

2022



ANNUAL REPORT

FLORIDA REHABILITATION CENTER
FOR THE BLIND

Thank you for your interest in and support of programs that provide and promote the use of vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs for Floridians who are blind or visually impaired.

Enclosed is a copy of the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind's (FRCB) Federal Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Agency and Governor Ron DeSantis.

Please contact Government Operations Consultant to the FRCB Brandis Hall if you have questions or comments regarding its contents. She can be reached at:

Florida Division of Blind Services
325 W. Gaines Street, Room 1114
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Phone 850-245-9305
Brandis.Hall@dbs.fldoe.org

If you would prefer a copy of this report in an alternative format, please contact the Florida Division of Blind Services at 850-245-0300 or toll-free at 800-342-1828.

FRCB Quarterly Meeting



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Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

January 11, 2023

U. S. Department of Education, OSERS
Rehabilitation Services Administration
Attn: Mary Williams
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202-2800

Dear Ms. Williams:

The Florida Rehabilitation Council of the Blind respectfully submits its 2022 Annual Report as required by Section 105(C) (4) of the 1992 Amendment to the Rehabilitation Act. In accordance with 34 CFR 361.17, a copy of this report has been submitted to the Florida Governor's Office.

This report presents our activities and recommendations for the 2021-2022 federal fiscal year to the Florida Division of Blind Services.

As the chair of the council, I would like to offer my appreciation and gratitude to the Division of Blind Services for its excellent support, and the council members for their diligence and contributions in serving Floridians with visual impairments.

If you have questions regarding this submission, please contact Brandis Hall assistant to the council at 850-245-9305.

Sincerely,

Jorge Hernandez, Chair
Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

JH/ss

cc: Governor Ron DeSantis
Christyne Cavataio

Message from the Chairman



The Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB) is pleased to present its annual report for Federal Fiscal Year 2022 (October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022) to the Governor and other committed stakeholders. In 2022, there was an increased effort on collaboration, planning, and advocacy on the part of the Council and the Division of Blind Services (DBS) in order to improve employment outcomes for Floridians who are blind or have low vision.

The FRCB elected officers are Jorge Hernandez, Chairman, Donté Mickens as Vice-Chair, and Doug Ingram as 2nd Vice-Chair. The FRCB had fourteen appointments/reappointments in 2022: Arthur Moody, representing the Client Assistance Program; Nancy Bateh, representing the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; Sophia Eccleston, representing the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB); Donté Mickens, representing as a former client of VR services; Sead Bekric, representing business, industry, and labor; Jorge Hernandez, representing community rehabilitation providers; Paul Martinez, representing a Disability Advocacy Group; Paul Edwards, representing a Disability Advocacy Group; Patricia Lipovsky, representing as a former client of VR services; Ciawanda McDonald, representing the Independent Living Council (FILC); Roxann Mayros, representing business, industry, and labor; Misty Porter, representing a Parent Training and Information Center; Denise Valkema, representing a Disability Advocacy Group. Bessie Outman, representing the parent, family member, guardian, advocate, or an authorized representative of a blind person. The Council continues to encourage appointees to apply and communicates with the Governor's office for appointments and reappointments to the council. Recruitment for new applicants will focus on individuals who are passionate, dedicated, and interested in improving the lives of visually impaired individuals.

The FRCB has worked closely with DBS in tracking employment outcome information and will continue to do so. We are pleased that DBS is able to report significant improvement in this core area of its responsibilities.

Furthermore, the FRCB did not let the challenges of the pandemic slow our work. The FRCB resumed in-persons meetings while continuing virtual/telephonic options to highlight the accomplishments and maintain awareness about issues related to DBS regional service offices and community rehabilitation programs. These meetings continue to feature public forums which give consumers around the state a voice, allowing them to provide input that encourages optimal services.

Jorge Hernandez
FRCB Chairman

Message from the Director

The Division of Blind Service appreciates the service and support of each of the members of the Florida Rehabilitation Council of the Blind (FRCB). With a full contingent of Council members, we continue to enjoy a strong partnership, with a common goal of maximizing employment and independent living for people who are blind or have low vision.

The Florida Division of Blind Services (DBS) has enjoyed a successful year by providing services for FFY 2021-2022 to 5,162 individuals seeking employment services. During the fiscal year, DBS helped a record 942 individuals gain, maintain, or advance in successful employment. These accomplishments are a collaborative effort of staff, providers, advocates, and stakeholders.

In addition to our partnerships with the FRCB, community rehabilitation programs and consumers, the division has been in a key role with other workforce partners, such as the local workforce boards, schools, the Office of Career and Adult Education, Florida Colleges, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. We have aligned priorities with the Governor's REACH office to strengthen our partnerships so that we can collaboratively meet the needs of Florida's workforce.

The Division of Blind Services will continue to build on its successes through these partners to assist more blind consumers in accessing all that Florida's robust workforce system has to offer. We remain focused on delivering quality services for Floridians in the blind or visually impaired community.

Robert L. Doyle, III
Director Division of Blind Services



DBS helped a record 942 individuals gain, maintain, or advance in successful employment.

FRCB Mission

The Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind reviews, analyzes, and advises on policy decisions and evaluates the effectiveness of the Florida Division of Blind Services to ensure meaningful access to and use of vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs for Floridians who are blind or visually impaired.

Vision Statement

The Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind functions to create a positive impact on the fairness, efficiency, and accessibility of services through the evaluation of consumer feedback and the Florida Division of Blind Services' performance.

FRCB Council Composition

- ❖ Independent Living Council (FILC)
- ❖ Parent Training & Information Center
- ❖ Client Assistance Program (CAP)
- ❖ VR Counselor (ex officio if staff)
- ❖ Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider (CRP)
- ❖ A former applicant or client of VR services (two seats)
- ❖ State Educational Agency (IDEA)
- ❖ Parent, family member, guardian, advocate, or an authorized representative of a blind person
- ❖ State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB)
- ❖ Business, Industry & Labor (four seats)
- ❖ Disability Advocacy Groups (four seats)
- ❖ Director of Division of Blind Services (Serves as Ex Officio Member)
- ❖ One Division of Blind Services (FDBS) employee (Serves as the Council's staff)

Total Seats: 20

FLORIDA REHABILITATION FOR THE BLIND



COUNCIL MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

Bessie "Earline" Outman
Daytona

Parent of the Blind

Bessie Outman was the parent of a blind person representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Earline, her preferred name, graduated from Jacksonville, Florida St. Luke Hospital School of Nursing in 1956. She worked for a physician for seventeen years. During that time, at five weeks pregnant, she contracted Rubella and was one of the many women in the Midwest to have a baby survive.

Although the future was unknown, Ms. Outman and her son have had an interesting adventure. With Autism spectrum (no speech until age 4), Cataracts (4 procedures to help him have sight before a year old), and Glaucoma which caused complete blindness in his first year of college. At the age of 78, Earline's career continued. She had the opportunity to serve in many fields, such as serving on the LaSalle County Illinois Board for the Developmentally Delayed, the Lions' Club Summer Camp in Lake Wales Florida, and as director of nursing at the Conklin Davis Center for the Visually Impaired in Daytona Beach.

Earline was a "Proud Parent" of a considerate and informed member of society, who writes poetry, is an avid baseball fan, and a good Christian man. Her son now serves as Secretary of the Greater Daytona Beach National Federation of the Blind.

Bessie "Earline" Outman passed away October 9, 2022.

Ciawanda McDonald
Daytona

Independent Living Council

Ciawanda McDonald is the Independent Living Council representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Ms. McDonald serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Disability Solutions for Independent Living, located in Daytona Beach, Florida. After a 10-year career in social services with the State of Florida, Ciawanda joined the Center for Independent Living in June of 2017 with the goal of empowering individuals with disabilities with innovative assistive technology, training, education, and resources needed to maintain independence in the community.

Ciawanda McDonald serves as a subject matter expert on disability, inclusion, and intersectionality. She currently serves on two Governor appointed Councils including, the Florida Independent Living Council and the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Ms. McDonald holds a Master's Degree in Occupational Therapy from the University of Saint Augustine, a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Troy University, and a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Florida State University.

Robert L. Doyle, III
Tallahassee

Director, Division of Blind Services

Robert Lee Doyle, III was appointed the Director of the Division of Blind Services on June 20, 2013.

Robert L. Doyle, III is the director of the Division of Blind Services at the Florida Department of Education. Director Doyle oversees services to Floridians who are blind or visually impaired through 18 local offices, including the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, the Braille and Talking Books Library and local community rehabilitation programs. Prior to joining the Division of Blind Services, Doyle served as director for the Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired. He has over 30 years of experience in human services, administration, insurance and financial services. Doyle holds a bachelor's degree in political studies and a master's degree in public administration, both from the University of Illinois-Springfield. Director Doyle served as president of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and he served as president of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind. He currently serves on the executive committees of both of these organizations and on the CareerSource Florida Board.

Mr. Doyle places a high priority on customer service, accountability, and positive relations with consumer groups and other stakeholders.

Paul Edwards
Miami

Business/Industry/Labor

Paul Edwards is one of the representatives of business/industry/labor on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

A native of San Francisco, Paul Edwards was born with very little light perception, which soon led to total blindness. He graduated from high school and completed his Bachelor's Degree in History with special honors at the Mona Jamaica campus of the University of the West Indies. He was the first blind student to attend the college. He later earned his graduate degree in International Relations.

Mr. Edwards taught at a small school in the rural area of Trinidad. After one year, he became the senior history master at Trinity College, the leading Anglican School for Boys in Trinidad and Tobago. Near the end of his teaching career, he earned a graduate degree in Education from the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad. When he left Trinidad, he moved to Florida where he worked for the Division of Blind Services as a rehabilitation teacher. In this job, he went to homes and taught people skills that would enable them to adjust to visual impairment. After three years, he became a rehabilitation counselor and worked mostly with high school and college students. In 1983, he moved to Jacksonville to take over as executive director of an agency serving the blind. In 1986, he moved to Miami to serve as the Director of Services to Students with Disabilities on the North Campus of Miami-Dade College, where his staff served more than 700 disabled students a year. He retired in May of 2012.

He has worked at the local, state, and national levels to advocate for persons who are blind. Mr. Edwards currently serves on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, the National Accreditation Council Board, and holds several positions within the American Council for the Blind and its Florida affiliate.

Misty Porter
St. Augustine

Parent Training and Information Center

Misty Porter serves as Parent Liaison for the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (FSDB) in St. Augustine, Florida.

She relocated her family in 2009 after determining Florida to be the best state in the nation to raise her young child with vision loss. Through employment at FSDB, Misty can support her passion for working with families of children with sensory loss. Ms. Porter works with a variety of stakeholders to assure that families are aware of and have access to the necessary information, supports, and resources to promote the achievement of student academic goals and lifelong learning.

Ms. Porter has more than a decade of experience working with families of young children with exceptional needs and has a passion for supporting early intervention and early learning programs. Before joining the team of experts at FSDB, Ms. Porter was employed as a service coordinator through the Early Steps Program. She has served on the Florida Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers, an advisory council for the Florida Early Steps Program that provides strategic programmatic recommendations to support positive outcomes for Florida families.

Ms. Porter is a State Certified trainer for INSITE and VIISA curriculums and provides training and information to professionals in early intervention working with families of children with sensory loss. She is a Parent Advisor with the Parent-Infant Program at FSDB and often provides training for her peers and coworkers. She co-authored "The Guide to Developing a Parent Empowerment Program" in collaboration with Florida's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention agency.

Her degree in sociology from Valdosta State University prepared Ms. Porter to understand how social-based organizations work and to apply that knowledge to support the families and communities that she serves. Ms. Porter partners with education and resource-based programs throughout the state. She often presents at conferences and workshops such as Florida's Family Cafe and EHDI (Early Hearing Detection & Intervention). As a mother of three children, two of whom have vision loss, Ms. Porter understands firsthand the positive impact a strong community, rich with quality programs, and accomplished mentors can have on the success of the upcoming youth in the blind community.

Arthur Moody
St, Petersburg

Client Assistance Program

Arthur Moody is the Client Assistance Program (CAP) representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Arthur serves as an Advocate/Investigator at Disability Rights Florida. In addition to working with individuals who request CAP assistance, Arthur serves on the Community Integration Team, advocating under state and federal law for all members of the community to receive equal access to places of public accommodation and provision of effective communication.

Arthur served as a senior counselor and as a consultant at Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation from 2013 - 2021. He earned a Master of Arts degree in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling from University of South Florida in Tampa in 2012. Arthur is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of Florida.

Sead Bekric
Naples

Business/Industry/Labor

Sead Bekric is one of the representatives of business/industry/labor on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Sead sustained a war injury which left him profoundly blind in both eyes. He decided to live his life to the fullest despite his blindness. During high school he served a three-year term on the National Advisory Committee on Youth Involvement. He also was a keynote speaker in many top corporations across the country; the speeches were on abilities of the physically challenged individuals in the workplace and meeting life challenges.

Mr. Bekric participated in the Hague for the International War Crime Tribunal as a witness. He has also managed and operated assistive technology business for the blind and visually impaired. Sead earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in International Relations and Global Affairs and Master's degree in International Business Marketing. He currently has a contract to manage one of the Business Enterprise's facilities in Collier County.

Jorge Hernandez
Miami

Community Rehabilitation Provider

Jorge Hernandez serves as the Community Rehabilitation Provider representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Jorge Hernandez is employed at Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired and is the current Manager of Technologies. After spending nearly two decades working in an institution of higher learning in the technology and accessibility field, he understands the needs and necessities of blind individuals who are seeking employment and the struggles of students in a campus environment. Mr. Hernandez believes it's important to connect with the people you are trying to help and communicate your understanding with personal experiences.

Hernandez has landed coverage in print and broadcast outlets in the Miami-Dade County area, including TV Marti en Español and the local CBS affiliate. Jorge has extensive Adaptive Technology experience; in addition, he is a member of the board of directors for the National Federation of the Blind of Florida (NFBF) and president of the local Miami-Dade Chapter of NFBF.

Jorge holds a B.S. in Information Technology with a Minor in Business Management from Florida International University.

Donté Mickens
Delray Beach

Former Client Representative

Donté Mickens is a former client representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

He is a graduate of Florida State University where he received a Master's Degree in Management with a Major in Risk Management/Insurance and Bachelor's Degrees in Finance and Risk Management. He is also a graduate of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine, Fla.

Mickens previously worked for the Division of Blind Services as an analyst, primarily assisting the Division's budget officer. He also mentored fellow university students and Division clients in previous years.

Mickens is involved with several non-profit boards and committees. He is the Chair of the Board of Directors for the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH). He also serves as Chair of the Board of Directors for Lighthouse for the Blind of the Palm Beaches. Donté is completing his first term on the Palm Tran Service Board which has oversight over the public transportation provided in Palm Beach County.

Donté is a Paralympic medalist as a member of the Men's U.S. National Goalball team, competing in the Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece and Beijing, China. He currently lives and works in the Delray Beach/Boca Raton area as a financial consultant with NCCI.

Douglas Ingram
Tallahassee

Disability Advocacy Group

Douglas Ingram is an advocacy group representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Douglas became legally blind in 2002 and retired from the State of Florida. In 2004 while self-employed, he worked in commercial and residential property maintenance. He also owns residential property for income.

In 2015 Douglas joined the National Federation of the Blind and American Council of the Blind to find other successful blind individuals that he could learn and be inspired by. He is a current member of the Blinded Veteran's Association and National Association of Blind Veterans, a national division of the NFB.

Nancy Bateh
Jacksonville

VR Counselor

Nancy Bateh is a VR Counselor representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Nancy is a visually impaired individual whose blindness has profoundly shaped who she is today. School was something that she worked twice as hard at, and it paid off. Nancy graduated high school with honors and went on to college.

Ultimately, Nancy completed her teacher's degree, and her dream became reality in April of 2010 when she secured a teaching position at a new Jacksonville high school. In addition to teaching her students how to read and write, Ms. Bateh more so wanted them to realize that a disability does not make obstacles impossible to overcome. That anything is possible if you have a goal to achieve and the confidence along with the strength to reach it. At the end of her first year of teaching, she made a life-changing decision to return to school to achieve a Master's Degree in Education with a focus on disabilities.

On February 18, 2021, Nancy celebrated her 6th year as a vocational rehabilitation counselor with the Jacksonville Division of Blind Services. Time with the Division has afforded her the ability to be an advocate for many individuals that she encounters daily as a counselor.

"Challenges are what make life interesting. Overcoming them is what makes life meaningful." – Joshua J. Morine

Robert Kelly
Daytona Beach

Business/Industry/Labor

Robert Kelly is a business/industry/labor representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

He is a certified rehabilitation counselor with more than 30 years of experience in direct service provision and administration of services for people who are blind and visually impaired. Mr. Kelly previously served as executive director for the Florida Lions Conklin Center for the Blind in Daytona Beach, Fla.

Roxann Mayros
New Port Richee

Business/Industry/Labor

Roxann Mayros is a Business/Industry/Labor representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Roxann spent her early career as an internal auditor at a major U.S. university, and as a consultant to Fortune 500 companies designing marketing information systems. In 1995, she was asked to evaluate the viability of a small nonprofit organization providing vision rehabilitation services in her hometown of New Port Richee, Florida. This was her first introduction to her true professional calling and where she spent the next twenty-five years working in the field of blindness and low vision at the local, state, and national level.

Roxann has served on national boards of directors, stabilized, and grown several nonprofit agencies, successfully achieved \$1,000,000 in funding for services to blind babies in Florida, led a national demonstration project for Medicare reimbursement of vision professionals, presented at national conferences, co-wrote articles printed in professional journals, and provided encouragement and knowledge to many nonprofit boards of directors and professional staff.

Roxann holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business, a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Management, is a certified consultant in board governance, and holds certifications in nonprofit management and nonprofit leadership.

Bruce Miles
Marco Island

Disability Advocacy Group

Bruce Miles is an Advocacy Group representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

He moved to Florida from Chicago, Ill. in 1972, along with his wife, Sheila, and son, Troy. He has been actively engaged in the real estate business on Marco Island since 1974. Mr. Miles owned and operated Gulf Coast Realty of Marco Inc. for many years and is now associated with Anchor Real Estate of Marco.

In addition to serving on the FRCB, Mr. Miles is also the treasurer of the Blind Services Foundation of Florida. He is a charter member and past president of Marco Island Area Association of Realtors. He was past president of the Marco Island Multi List Inc. Mr. Miles has served on many committees with the Florida Association of Realtors (FAR) and was chair of the Professional Standards and the Resort and Second Home committees.

He is very active on the local level, including serving as the director of the Marco Island Fair Water Defense Fund committee, which negotiated a buyout of the local water utility. He is a six-term past president of the Marco Island Lions Club, currently serving as a board member and tail twister. He is the past director on the board of the Lighthouse of Collier and Florida Lions Conklin Center.

Mr. Miles is no stranger to the Division of Blind Services. He served on their advisory council from 1985 to 1995 and then on the Florida Rehab Council for the Blind from 1995 to 2001.

Patricia Lipovsky
Daytona Beach

Former Client

Patricia Lipovsky is a representative for former clients on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

A native of New Jersey, Ms. Lipovsky advocates for people with disabilities throughout the state of Florida, as well as her local community, encouraging equal accessibility and opportunity for all, and is also the proud mom of three children and six grandchildren. Although she considers herself to be retired, for the most part, she enjoys dabbling in real estate and property management, which she has done for several years.

In addition to serving on the FRCB, Patricia also served on the Florida Independent Living Council (FILC), for several years, was the President and Treasurer of the Handicapped Adults of Volusia County (HAVOC), and currently serves as the Vice-President of the Coalition and Concerns of the Totally Blind (CCTB). Ms. Lipovsky also serves on several local committees, including the Citizens Advisory Committee for Volusia County and the TDLCB Board for the Transportation company of Volusia County, Votran. In addition to her role on several committees in her local community, she serves as the Treasurer of the Friends of Library Access, which supports the Braille and Talking Book Library in Daytona Beach by providing audiobooks to the print-impaired throughout the State of Florida. She is also a member of the Lions Club and serves on two state committees of the Florida Council of the Blind, (FCB).

Her mission is to help people, wherever and whenever she can. Her favorite quotes are “Where there is a will, there is a way,” and “If God brings you to it, he will bring you through it.”

Sophia Eccleston
Palm Beach

State Workforce Investment Board

Sophia Eccleston is the State Workforce Investment Board representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

An Army Veteran and Jamaican national, Sophia Eccleston is a member of the Clean Energy Solutions Team at Nextera Energy Resources.

As a Senior External Affairs (EA) manager in Palm Beach County, Sophia is responsible for advocating with local elected officials and key community stakeholders on behalf of Florida Power and Lights. She is also responsible for emergency response management for the state. Prior to joining EA, she worked as a solar developer and developed universal solar energy centers located in Desoto, Manatee and Charlotte counties.

Sophia served more than four years in the military on both active and reserve duty. She was stationed in Heidelberg, Germany and Savannah, Georgia. While in the military, she supported the peace keeping mission in Bosnia. She was also responsible for managing equipment and supplies for the 95th Military Police Battalion and the 224th Military Intelligence Battalion.

Along with her military experience, Sophia also worked for Halliburton and KBR Inc., in the Middle East and Africa. Two of her most notable roles were negotiating multimillion-dollar contracts to build infrastructure in Iraq and Afghanistan for the United States military and starting up the first Regional Expediting Department located Dubai. She oversaw KBR expediting offices in Jordan and Turkey. Sophia built a team that managed millions of dollars in equipment and supplies supporting the U.S. military throughout the Middle East and Africa.

Sophia currently serves as the 2022 Chair on the Florida Commission on the Status of Women. She was appointed to the commission by Florida’s Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis. In 2020, she was

appointed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to the CareerSource Florida Board, where she currently serves on the executive committee. In 2019, she was appointed by the Governor to the newly formed Florida Women’s Suffrage Centennial Commission. She currently serves on multiple board of directors, including the Palm Beach County Homeless Advisory Board, the Greater Boca Raton Chamber of Commerce, and the Town of Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce. She also serves on the Florida Bar Grievance committee, the Health Care District of Palm Beach County’s Finance committee, and the United Way of Palm Beach County’s Mission United Advisory Committee. Her prior board membership includes the Homeless Coalition of Palm Beach County, Executive Women of the Palm Beaches Foundation, Boynton Beach Chamber of Commerce, Delray Beach Chamber of Commerce, Gulfstream Goodwill Industries, and the Wounded Veteran Relief Fund, as well as others.

In 2021, Sophia was awarded the Diamond award by the Greater Boca Raton Chamber of Commerce. She was awarded the Change Agent award by the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, South Palm Beach Chapter. In 2019, she was honored as a “Community Influencer” by the Achievement Centers for Children and Families. In 2018, Sophia was named by Legacy Magazine of South Florida as one of South Florida’s Most Powerful and Influential Black Business Leaders. In 2017, Sophia was honored by the City of West Palm Beach as a “Hometown Hero.” She was a finalist for the 2017 Greater Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce Athena Leadership Awards.

Sophia has a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice and an MBA with a concentration in Organizational Psychology and Development. She is a certified organizational development professional (OD) and holds a Lean Six Sigma green belt certification. She completed a training program on Leadership and Negotiations from Harvard Law School and is also an alumna of Leadership Palm Beach County. Sophia resides in Wellington, Florida, and enjoys traveling the world during her time off.

Denise Valkema
Jacksonville

Disability Advocacy Group

Denise Valkema is an Advocacy Group representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Ms. Valkema is a member of the National Federation of the Blind and currently serves as an affiliate board member and vice president of the Jacksonville chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Florida. She was the immediate past president. She currently serves on the Jacksonville Transportation Advisory Committee (JTAC).

Ms. Valkema graduated with an Associate in Arts Degree and an Associate in Science Degree in Early Childhood Education from Miami Dade College. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from Clearwater Christian College. Ms. Valkema was appointed to the Miami Dade County Commission on Disability Issues from 2004-2012. She served on the Miami Dade County Local Coordinating Board for the transportation disadvantaged 2004–2020.

Paul Martinez
Tampa

Disability Advocacy Group

Paul Martinez is an Advocacy Group representative on the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

Mr. Martinez is an Ambassador for the Multiple Sclerosis Society, serves on the Bay Legal Services Board of Directors, and is President of the National Federation of the Blind. Paul earned his associate degree in liberal arts from Hillsborough Community College and currently attends the University of South Florida.

Vacant Seats: 3

- State Educational Agency (IDEA)
- Parent, family member, guardian, advocate, or an authorized representative of a blind person
- Business/Industry/Labor (1 Seat)

DBS Mission Statement

To ensure blind and visually impaired Floridians have the tools, support, and opportunity to achieve success.

DBS Vision Statement

In partnership with others, create a barrier-free environment in the lives of Floridians with visual disabilities.



Accomplishments

- ❖ The Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB) continues to review, analyze, and advise on policy decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of the Florida Division of Blind Services to ensure meaningful access to and use of vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs for Floridians who are blind or visually impaired. The FRCB functions to create a positive impact on the fairness, efficiency, and accessibility of services through the evaluation of consumer feedback and the Florida Division of Blind Services' performance.
- ❖ As of October 14, 2022, the FRCB has a total of 15 voting members. Robert Doyle, the Director of the Florida Division of Blind Services, and Nancy Bateh, VR Counselor, serve on the FRCB as ex-officio members.
- ❖ The FRCB continues to recruit qualified individuals to complete the application process for consideration and appointment by the Governor to serve on the Council. The FRCB received 7 new appointments and 7 reappointments in October 2022.
- ❖ During the FFY 2021-2022, the FRCB met virtually in October 2021, with a focus on input from the Tampa district. The FRCB also met in-person in Pensacola, on February 10-11, 2022, in Daytona Beach on May 5-6, 2022, and Orlando on July 28-29, 2022.



Accomplishments (cont.)

- ❖ The FRCB continues to serve as an effective vehicle for cultivating meaningful partnerships between the FDBS, stakeholders, and consumers by holding public forums at our meetings. During 2021-2022, the FRCB scheduled and held four public forums.
- ❖ During the year, the FRCB received regular updates on an initiative being sponsored by the Blind Services Foundation to develop a vocational evaluation tool for the Blind, now named “Florida Vision Vocational Evaluation Tool”.
- ❖ The Council toured the Braille and Talking Book Library, Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Conklin Davis Center for the Visually Impaired, Inc. in Daytona.
- ❖ The Council continued to oversee the development and implementation of the Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS). The FRCB contracts with Florida State University Survey Foundry to conduct the CSS. The SFY 2021/2022 Annual Report was presented to the Council at their virtual meeting on October 27, 2022, by Dr. Minna Jia. A copy of the report can be found on the FDBS website.



Division of Blind Services 2020-2025 Strategic Plan Goals

Goal 1: Highest Client Achievement

Objective: Coordinate and secure high-quality training, education, work experiences, and partnerships that create opportunities for blind and visually impaired Floridians to obtain and maintain independence, post-secondary education credentials, and successful employment outcomes.

Goal 2: Seamless Articulation and Maximum Access

Objective: Create a comprehensive service delivery system that fosters accessibility and provides positive experiences for blind and visually impaired Floridians enabling them to matriculate from school/training to work. Improve outreach methods to reach more consumers, advocates, providers, employers, and other stakeholders.

Goal 3: Skilled Workforce and Economic Development

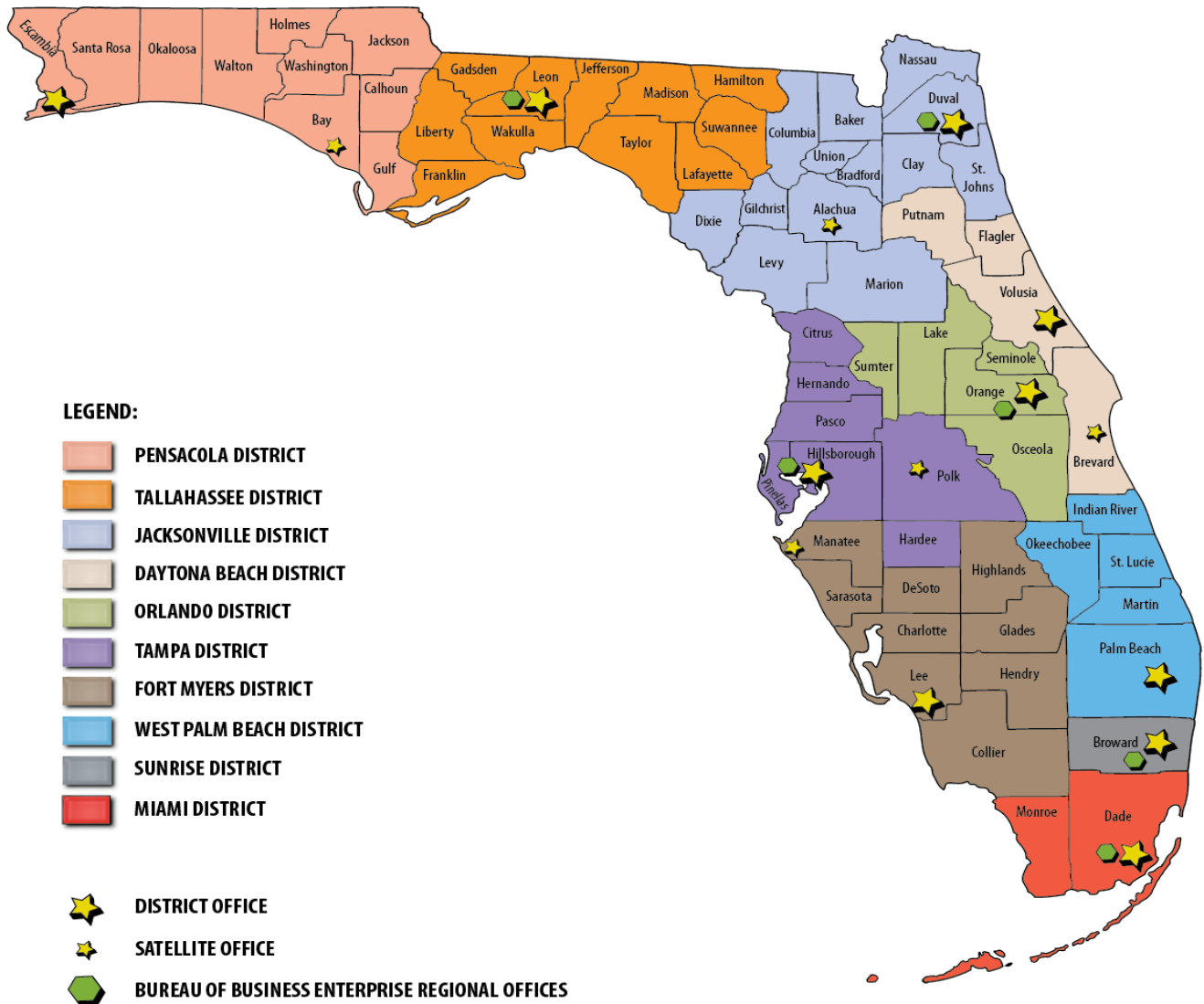
Objective: Assist blind and visually impaired Floridians with obtaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment.

Goal 4: Quality Efficient Services

Objective: Create an accountable and exemplary division workforce that ensures high-quality services.

Division of Blind Services District Offices

District Offices by Counties Served



Quarterly Meeting and Public Forums

During the 2021-2022 FFY, the FRCB held four meetings: Tampa, Pensacola, Daytona, and Orlando. At each quarterly meeting, a public forum was held to receive consumer input on the effectiveness of services provided by DBS.

- October 28, 2021 – Tampa (Virtual TEAMS Meeting)
- February 10-11, 2022 – Pensacola
- May 5-6, 2022 – Daytona
- July 28-29, 2022 – Orlando

Agenda Items

- Welcome, Introductions, and Pledge of Allegiance
- Adoption of Agenda
- Director's Report: Division of Blind Services Updates
- District Administrator's Report
- Employer Recognition
- Local Community Rehabilitation Program Reports
- Client Satisfaction Survey Data Updates
- Division of Blind Services State Plan Updates
- Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Outcome Updates
- Public Transportation Updates
- Bureau of Business Enterprise Update
- FDBS Budget Report and Legislative Updates
- Blind Services Foundation Update
- Updates on Outreach to Underserved/Unserved
- Strategic Plan Discussions
- Library Patron Trends Update

Employer Recognition

The Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and the Division of Blind Services annually offers their gratitude to local businesses and employers who support FDBS by hiring and showing support towards individuals who are blind or visually impaired by creating a barrier-free environment allowing them to obtain their independence.

The FRCB and FDBS presented the Appreciation Awards at each quarterly business meeting. For FFY 2021-2022, the following employers were recognized:



Customer Satisfaction Survey (2021-2022)

Beginning in 2004, the FRCB began to collect customer satisfaction data on a more "real-time" basis. Rather than conduct one survey that included all the clients who had their cases closed the preceding year, the FRCB decided to have the data collected on a monthly basis and review the results at their quarterly meetings. This report summarizes the data collected for the 2021-22 state fiscal year, which includes cases closed between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022. The Customer Satisfaction Survey of former DBS clients gathers perspectives of former DBS clients concerning program services, levels of satisfaction, and areas for program improvement. This report describes the methods used and presents the 2021-2022 results for clients with cases closed between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022. In the Fall of 2009, the FRCB modified the previous survey to streamline the interviews and update information in new areas. Some minor modifications to this survey were made in October 2010. Many of the items remained comparable or identical to the survey administered the previous 10 years. In these instances, data for the 10 previous years are provided for comparison purposes. For new questions, major modifications made to question wording, or questions asked of different populations (new screens), no comparisons to prior years can be made. In 2015, the fiscal year changed from the months of April through March to the months of July through June. Data for the years since 2014 are based on the new schedule. Beginning in July of 2017, the FRCB has included questions regarding local service providers in addition to DBS.

Survey Procedures

The Florida State University Survey Foundry (FSUSF), Institute of Science and Public Affairs, conducts a telephone survey of former DBS clients on a monthly basis. Survey data below is for clients whose cases were closed between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

DBS provided FSUSF the names, addresses, phone numbers, and demographic information for 1,104 former clients. Case closures are classified into two major groupings, those with successful and unsuccessful closures. Successful closures consist of clients who meet their employment goals, while unsuccessful closures consist of clients who exited the program prior to meeting their intended employment goals.

- Successful Closure – 755 Clients (68%)
- Unsuccessful Closure – 349 Clients (32%)

Overall Satisfaction

Client Satisfaction with the DBS program is high.

To gauge the overall level of satisfaction with the DBS program, former clients were asked if they would recommend DBS services to others. During 2021-22, 93 percent (208 of 223) of the responding clients said “yes” they would recommend DBS services to others. Clients were also asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the program. During 2021-22, 90 percent of the clients (201 of 223) were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the program.

Beginning in 2017, former clients were also asked to evaluate their local service providers separately from DBS. During 2021-2022, 96 percent would recommend their local service provider. When clients were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their local service provider, 93 percent indicated they were satisfied.

For a complete copy of the Customer Satisfaction Survey of Division of Blind Services Clients survey results for SFY 2021-2022, please visit our website at the link below.

[Florida Division of Blind Services Rehab Council \(fldoe.org\)](https://www.fldoe.org)

Outcomes

The following graph represents the number of clients served during federal fiscal years 2016-2022. The chart also shows how many obtained employment (successful closures). The number of successful closures increased each year except for FFY 2020, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Florida DBS Vocational Rehabilitation Performance Measures

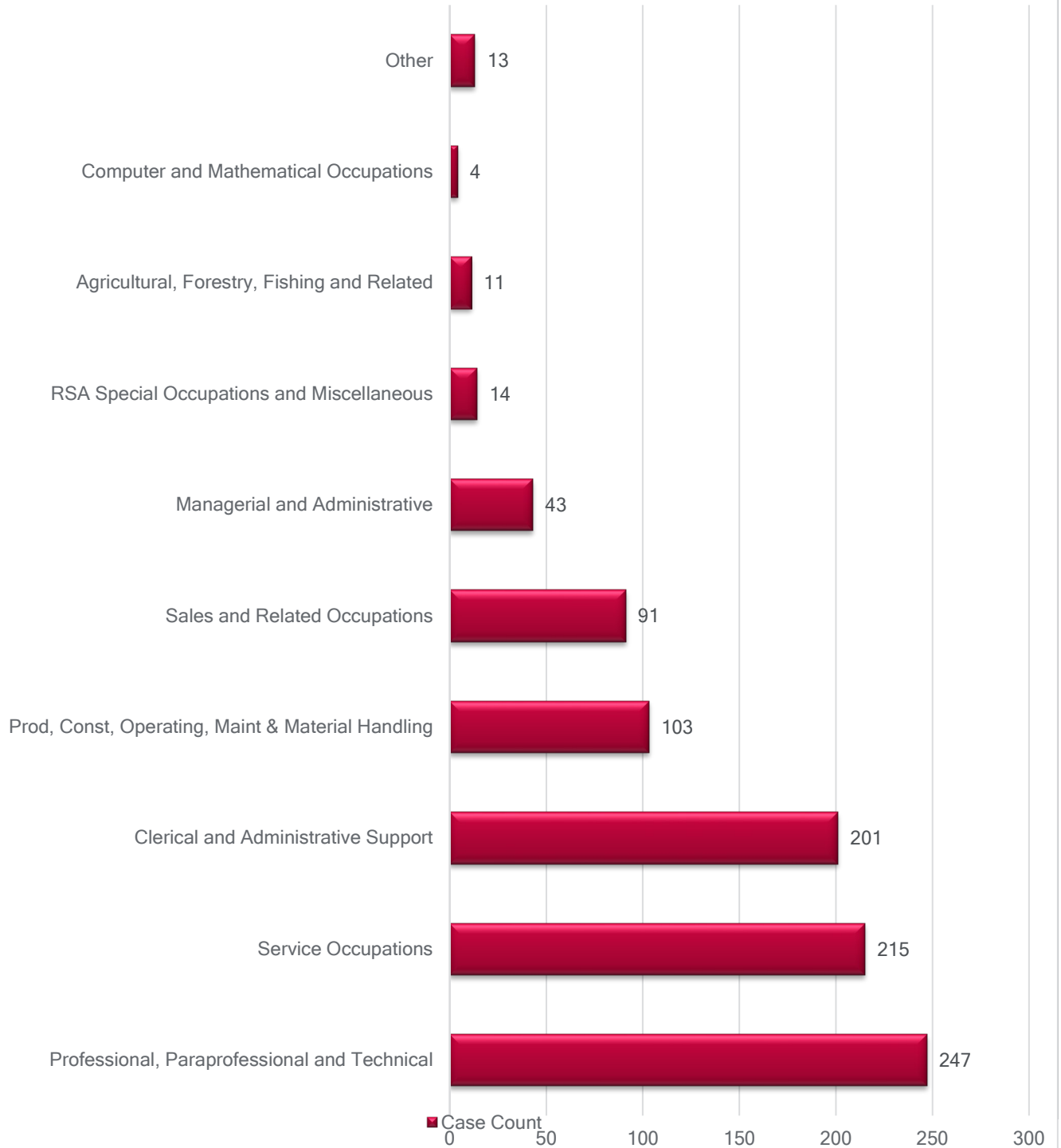
DBS VR Performance Based Data	FFY2016	FFY 2017	FFY2018	FFY2019	FFY2020	FFY2021	FFY2022
Number of Customers Served	5333	5039	5031	4997	4990	5,129	5162
Number of Customers Successfully Closed	813 (↑ 5%)	851 (↑ 5%)	856 (↑ .6%)	878 (↑ 3%)	832 (↓ 5%)	903 (↑ 9%)	942 (↑ 4%)

The following graph represents consumer outcomes based on hours worked and wages earned. The average hourly wage increased each year with the exception of a slight decrease in 2021. The projected average annual earnings are higher than the average cost per case, more than doubling DBS' return on investment.

Consumers Earnings Data

	FFY2016	FFY 2017	FFY2018	FFY2019	FFY2020	FFY2021	FFY2022
Average # of Hours Worked Per Week	27.76	28.94	29.96	30.24	31.07	30.84	32.07
Average Hourly Wage	\$12.98	\$13.85	\$14.61	\$14.69	\$16.91	\$16.63	\$ 16.66
Average Weekly Wage	\$384.61	\$405.21	\$441.62	\$456.62	\$523.26	\$534.65	\$ 562.25
Projected Average Annual Earnings at Placement	\$19,999.86	\$21,070.72	\$22,964.30	\$23,744.17	\$27,209.67	\$27,801.59	\$29,237.01
Average Case Cost	\$8,339.81	\$9,719.45	\$9,255.95	\$9,787.25	\$8,535.55	\$9,350.33	\$9,592.38

Number of DBS Clients Achieving Gainful Employment



Committees

Executive Committee

Jorge Hernandez, Chair
Donté Mickens, First Vice Chair
Douglas Ingram, Second Vice Chair

Planning Committee

Douglas Ingram, Second Vice Chair
Patricia Lipovsky
Bruce Miles (Overseer)
Paul Edwards

Evaluation Committee

Donté Mickens, First Vice Chair (Overseer)
Robert Kelly
Howard Bell
Patricia Lipovsky
Nancy Bateh

How to Become an FRCB Member

The Governor appoints the members of the council in accordance with Section 105 of the Rehab Act and Chapter 413.011, Florida Statutes. Appointments are for three-year terms. A majority of the council shall be persons who are: (1) blind, and (2) not employed by the division.

The Gubernatorial Appointments Questionnaire can be found at [Governor's Appointment Website](#)

Questions regarding the Council or the application process may be directed to:

Florida Rehabilitation Council f/t Blind

Florida Division of Blind Services

325 West Gaines Street

Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Telephone : 850-245-9305

Fax: 850-245-0363

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis

Appointments Office

Telephone 850-717-9243

Fax: 850-921-0733

APPENDIX A.

FFY 2021-2022 FRCB Expenses

	2021			2022									
Expense	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
Council Travel					\$1,457.93			\$3,384.28		\$4,232.58			\$9,074.79
Client Satisfaction Survey	\$13,500											\$13,500	\$ 27,000
Advertising	\$48.44		\$21.84				\$92.68	\$48.58	\$51.24	\$23.94		\$22.96	\$309.68
Venue Meeting Space					\$1,884.20					\$3,062.50			\$4,946.70
Supplies	\$238.00						\$75.03						\$313.03
Total	\$13,786.44		\$21.84		\$3,342.13		\$167.71	\$3,432.86	\$51.24	\$7319.02		\$13,522.96	\$41,644.20



For More Information, Please Contact:
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