NEW MEXICO COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

STRATEGIC PLAN

August 22, 2024 through August 31, 2029

(1) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission for the Blind (Commission) met on August 22, 2024, and approved the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan was revised to address significant changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to address significant changes in economic and demographic trends. The Commission developed the strategic plan through discussion and input from a variety of Key stakeholders, including the Commission's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The SRC is established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and is required to be comprised of a majority of individuals who are blind and who represent a variety of stakeholders. The Strategic Plan was discussed and reviewed by the SRC during meetings held in Santa Fe on November 15, 2023, in Santa Fe on February 6, 2024, and in Albuquerque on May 16, 2024. A public meeting was held in Albuquerque on July 19, 2024, with the purpose being to provide the public an opportunity to offer input on the Strategic Plan. All meetings were held pursuant to the Commission's Open Meetings Act Resolution, and all meetings allowed for the public to participate over Zoom.

(2) INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS

a. Situation Inventory

The Commission is the key state agency for providing and integrating services for adults who are legally blind. The Commission has historically produced a very high level of quality employment outcomes achieved by Commission consumers, and the Commission continues to place a high emphasis on quality employment outcomes.

The Executive Director serves on the State Workforce Development Board, the Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation serves on the Central Area Local Workforce Development Board, and the Deputy Director for Finance and Administration serves on the Northern Board. The Executive Director also serves on the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities. Other Commission employees also serve on numerous additional councils and entities, including the Statewide Independent Living Council, the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program, the Statewide Transition Coordinating Council, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The Executive Director also has the national perspective as a Past President of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), and his continued service on the NCSAB Executive Committee. Responding to the pandemic, The Executive Director and Skills Center Coordinator also joined the Disability, Access, and Functional Needs Group, which works to coordinate pandemic and emergency responses.

b. Environmental Scan

The Commission is governed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and imposed a new requirement that 15 percent of the Vocational Rehabilitation grant be reserved and spent on provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students who are age 14 to 21. The Commission is also governed by regulations and sub-regulatory guidance issued by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which is a program within the United States Department of Education. RSA issues regulations, policy directives, and technical assistance circulars which interpret the Rehabilitation Act and the Randolph-Sheppard Act. The Commission is also covered by federal fiscal regulations, specifically the Uniform Guidance, 2 CFR Part 200. The Uniform Guidance imposes numerous fiscal requirements. RSA strictly applies these applicable fiscal and program rules, some of which only apply to the Vocational Rehabilitation program. This includes 34 CFR 361.63(c), which authorizes the Commission to spend Social Security program income on the provision of Title VII independent living services. The federal vocational rehabilitation grant is also subject to a maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement. The Commission is obligated to observe these very complex regulations, policy directives, and technical assistance circulars.

The Commission provides its services in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), whose members are appointed by the Governor. The Commission also works with a committee of blind vendors, whose members are elected by the licensed blind managers who run vending facilities pursuant to the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act, as well as the companion state vending law at 22-14-24 NMSA 1978. Additionally, the Commission is governed by various state statutes and regulations, including the Commission for the Blind Act which established the Commission and created a three-person board of directors appointed by the Governor. The Commission is also a partner under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Commission must also operate pursuant to other applicable law, including the state Human Rights Act, the Governmental Conduct Act, the Open Meetings Act, the Per Diem and Mileage Act, the Procurement Code, Section 102 of the Rehab Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

High levels of gas and oil production have resulted in significantly increased state revenues, and New Mexico is experiencing substantial budget surpluses. However, this is an income stream that is subject to unpredictable fluctuations, with the long-term prospect being that the transition from fossil fuels will likely result in reduced income from gas and oil in future years. Prior fluctuations in oil prices had resulted in state budget deficits and a reduction in the Commission’s state appropriation. In addition, the federal requirement to reserve and spend 15 percent of the Vocational Rehabilitation grant on Pre-Employment Transition Services has reduced the amount of federal vocational rehabilitation funds that are available to serve the Commission’s adult vocational rehabilitation consumers. The 15 percent Pre-ETS reserve along with lingering effects of the pandemic have also resulted in some vocational rehabilitation agencies needing to return unspent vocational rehabilitation funds to the U.S. Department of Education. For FFY23, $383 million was returned by agencies unable to use the full amount of their vocational rehabilitation award. Should this trend continue, it is possible that the return of such a significant amount of vocational rehabilitation funds may result in a reduction of the annual cost of living adjustment that the vocational rehabilitation program has historically received.

c. Anticipation or Foresight

Population Served

The Commission serves populations which can be placed into two basic groups;

\*Persons who receive vocational rehabilitation services and have an employment goal

\*Persons who receive independent living services and have an independent living goal

There are significant trends that can be identified in regard to both population groups.

EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Transition Services

The Commission helps young persons who are preparing to leave the school setting, including students aged 14 to 21 who are in transition either immediately to work, or to college or vocational training settings. The important trends within this population of young person’s include:

\* Increased numbers of youth with mental health disorders and multiple disabilities;

\*Youth who lack soft skills and independent living skills;

\*Decreased rates of literacy and Braille proficiency;

\*Youth who require greater assistive technology services;

On October 19, 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a "national state of emergency in child and adolescent mental health." According to the declaration, the "COVID-19 pandemic has taken a serious toll on children's mental health," with a "45 percent increase in the number of self-injury and suicide cases in 5- to 17-year-olds." The Surgeon General responded to the declaration on December 14, 2021, noting that young people face "unprecedented challenges that exact a toll on their mental health." On May 23, 2023, the Surgeon General issued an additional advisory, this one on the effects of social media on youth mental health, noting that "adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social media face double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes."

There is also a significant increase in the rate of Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH) is now the leading cause of blindness in children. Persons with ONH frequently have disabilities in addition to blindness.

There is also a significant increase in the rate of diabetes in children. According to a report in the Journal of the American Medical association, the number of children with Type 2 diabetes increased by more than 50 percent between 2001 and 2017, with the prevalence of Type 1 diabetes increasing by nearly 60 percent during the same period. This increasing prevalence of diabetes in youth will likely result in a growing number of adult consumers with blindness due to diabetic retinopathy. These consumers will also have other diabetic complications that will need to be addressed. The high rate of obesity amongst youth in New Mexico is also an exacerbating factor. According to a 2022 study from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 23.9 percent of New Mexico children between the ages of 10 and 17 have obesity, giving the state a ranking of 49 among the 50 states and District of Columbia for childhood obesity. This is an increase from 16.9 percent and a ranking of 40 in 2019. The rates for obesity among kindergarten and third grade children is even more concerning. According to the New Mexico Department of Health Statewide Childhood Obesity Surveillance System, in 2022, 31 percent of kindergarten students and 42.7 percent of third grade students had overweight or obesity. The increase in obesity may be due to the pandemic which limited access to healthy school meals and physical education classes. Compounding matters still further is the fact that obesity and diabetes are risk factors for severe illness from COVID-19. The rate of blindness due to prematurity continues to be a serious concern, with COVID contributing to a spike in the rate of premature births. In 2021, the rate of premature births increased to 10.5 percent, the highest level seen since 2007.

The reduction in Braille proficiency is resulting in a corresponding decrease in overall reading skills and literacy, as well as decreased skills in Braille math. Persons who are proficient in Braille have been shown to have a greater likelihood of becoming successfully employed. The decrease in Braille proficiency is primarily due to the trend to mainstream blind students; the shortage of qualified teachers of the visually impaired; and the use of audio books, magnification, or other reading methods which are sometimes substituted inappropriately for Braille. The Commission will need to provide these students with additional support and training for them to achieve a successful employment outcome, including through services provided at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo and at the Skills Center in Albuquerque.

The technology revolution and advent of artificial intelligence is causing a corresponding increase in the need to provide transitioning students with assistive technology that is adapted for use by the blind. Many school districts lack both the expertise and resources to provide this assistive technology. In addition, there exists a serious gap with respect to technology that is used at home, with many parents being unable to afford the needed assistive technology. Where appropriate, the Commission works to provide this assistive technology to assure that the transitioning student has the greatest opportunity for a successful educational and employment outcome. The Commission receives “Technology for Children” funding through a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health. The Technology for Children program serves as an outreach activity to build and strengthen relationships with school districts, to provide information about vocational rehabilitation services to schools and parents, and to remove barriers that might otherwise impede the employability of vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Technology for Children program also identifies students who are eligible for Commission services, helping to prepare these students for participation in the Commission’s vocational rehabilitation program.

The pandemic will also have a significant and lasting impact on the provision of transition services. The pandemic disrupted the provision of educational services, and many blind and low vision students did not receive adequate levels of instruction in Braille and Orientation & Mobility during the pandemic. These were subjects that were not well suited to remote instruction, and these students had their educational progress delayed or interrupted as a result. New Mexico is currently ranked 49th in the country for literacy, and Three out of four New Mexico fourth graders are unable to read at grade level. The Commission will need to be prepared to provide additional transition services to support these students, including compensating for educational services that were not provided during the pandemic.

To further enhance transition services, the Commission has established a written cooperative agreement with the New Mexico Public Education Department. The Commission also has written agreements with many of the state’s local school districts. The Commission has focused on obtaining agreements with the medium-sized school districts that are most likely to have students who are blind or have low vision, and that also have greater barriers due to rural and socio-economic factors.

The Pre-Employment Transition Services requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) have placed a significant financial and administrative burden on vocational rehabilitation agencies, including the Commission. WIOA requires that vocational rehabilitation agencies reserve and spend 15 percent of the Vocational Rehabilitation grant on specific transition services for students aged 14 to 21. The Rehabilitation Services Administration has issued regulations and sub-regulatory guidance that do not allow the reserved funds to be spent on services such as college tuition and computers. In addition, administrative costs cannot be charged to the reserve. While some transition services are expanded, other transition activities can only be met using the regular portion of the Vocational Rehabilitation grant. The result is that fewer funds are available to serve adults.

Adult Vocational Rehabilitation

The important trends within the adult population include:

\*Increased numbers of persons with multiple disabilities, including due to the pandemic;

\*Young adults with Failure to Launch Syndrome;

\*More adults lacking Braille proficiency;

\*More persons needing technology training to graduate and become employed;

\*More persons engaged in remote work;

\*More persons remaining employed beyond the traditional retirement age;

\*Fewer persons electing to participate in the workforce;

To a large extent, the trends that are seen in the area of transition services will very much shape the face of the vocational rehabilitation services that will be provided over the next five years to adults. This will include the need to provide young adults with additional services to compensate for Braille and orientation and mobility instruction that was not received as a result of the pandemic. The increasing rate of Optic Nerve Hypoplasia will also result in an expanding number of consumers needing greater amounts of vocational rehabilitation services.

The Commission will need to serve an increased number of consumers who have incurred disabilities as a result of COVID-19. According to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine on July 17, 2024, 7.7 percent of unvaccinated adults and 3.5 percent of vaccinated adults experienced long COVID. These individuals may suffer from conditions such as fatigue, cognitive impairment, anxiety, depression, and cardiac inflammation. There is also strong evidence that COVID-19 causes diabetes, with one study showing that 14 percent of patients who were hospitalized due to COVID incurred new cases of diabetes.

The prevalence of diabetes was also increasing prior to the pandemic, with the lifetime risk of diabetes doubling in the last 20 years. Males born in 2000 have a 32.8 percent lifetime chance of developing diabetes, and females born in 2000 have a 38.5 percent lifetime chance of developing diabetes. For Hispanics born in 2000, the lifetime risk for males is 45.4 percent, and 52.5 percent for females. According to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, from 2011 to 2019, the overall gestational diabetes rate has increased from 47.6 to 63.5 per one thousand live births. It is likely that future studies will show that these numbers are now even greater due to the effect of the pandemic. This increasing prevalence of diabetes will result in more consumers with blindness due to diabetic retinopathy.

The pandemic has also expanded opportunities for remote work. The advent of remote work has removes or mitigated transportation barriers for persons who are blind or have low vision, and may enable some individuals to become employed who live in rural portions of the state where there is limited access to transportation.

Delayed maturation, which has been called "Failure to Launch Syndrome," is a trend that is seen in some young adults. It is also present in the population of persons who are blind or have low vision. These consumers will require more vocational rehabilitation services, including services provided at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo and at the Skills Center in Albuquerque.

With the pandemic over and the state economy being strong and generating lower rates of unemployment, the Commission is starting to see improvement in the number and quality of employment outcomes. However, the federal government remains a major employer in New Mexico, and federal budget deficits continues to result in significant constraints in the number of federal employees, as well as to persons employed by federal contractors. State and local governments have historically been a significant source of employment for persons who are blind or have low vision, and it is anticipated that the strong state economy will also result in additional employment outcomes. New opportunities made possible by remote work should likewise result in increased employment outcomes.

The “graying of the population” is resulting in increased numbers of persons electing or needing to remain employed beyond the traditional retirement age of 65. Approximately 20 percent of persons 65 and older are currently working. According to an Associated Press poll, 23 percent of persons say that they will never retire, and approximately 25 percent say that they expect to work beyond the age of 65. There is a strong correlation between age and blindness, and the Commission can expect that many of these older workers will require vocational rehabilitation services.

INDEPENDENT LIVING AND OLDER BLIND

There are two primary trends that are identified in the area of independent living and Older Blind services:

\*Increasing numbers of consumers due to the aging of the population;

\*Increasing use of technology by seniors and other persons who are blind or have low vision;

The Commission provides independent living services which help blind persons to live in their own homes and communities. Most of these persons are newly blind and over 55 years of age (older blind). Because of the aging of the population, the number of older blind Americans is predicted to increase dramatically in the coming years. According to the most recent American Community Survey, there are 32,864seniors in New Mexico who are 65 and older and who report having serious difficulty seeing. In addition, 3.5% of Americans over 65 are legally blind. The aging of the population is also resulting in an increase of the number of persons who have both vision and hearing loss. According to a report from the University College London presented at the 2024 Alzheimer's Association International Conference, hearing loss is associated with seven percent of dementia cases, and the presence of untreated vision loss is associated with two percent of dementia cases. Providing independent living services to persons with vision loss will be critical to prevent or delay the onset of dementia, and especially for individuals who also have hearing loss, or who are from underserved communities that are disproportionately affected by dementia. Seniors are also at higher risk of severe illness due to COVID-19, and future COVID outbreaks may negatively impact on the delivery of services to these individuals.

The Commission had responded to the need for additional independent living services by adding a second independent living teacher to serve the Las Cruces area. Las Cruces was selected because of the high number of retirees in southern New Mexico. The Commission has recently expanded the scope of equipment that is provided to independent living consumers to include desktop video magnifiers.

(3) SUCCESSION PLANNING

Succession planning is a critical need for vocational rehabilitation agencies. It is even more urgent for state agencies for the blind as such agencies concentrate management, fiscal, and administrative functions in fewer individuals, making each individual critically important to the overall operation of the agency. There is also a shortage of professionals who are qualified to hold many of these positions, and most especially of qualified professionals who are blind. In addition, prior state budget reductions have further concentrated critical duties in key staff. At the same time, regulatory and administrative burdens have significantly increased. To prevent knowledge collapse, the Commission must anticipate the departure of key employees and plan accordingly. The pandemic has served to further underscore the need to plan for unexpected departures of key staff.

The Commission has only had four executive directors in its 38-year history. The current executive director has served since 1999, and the Commission will be hiring a new executive director sometime during the term of this Strategic Plan. The Commission will maintain an awareness of the possible and likely departure schedules of key employees, as well as the departure of other staff which may engender succession difficulties. Maximum effort will be undertaken to seek exceptions to any hiring freeze, and to cross-train and mentor key employees. The Commission will also seek to find ways to insulate vital computer systems and applications from staff departures. To the maximum extent possible, the Executive Director, Deputy Directors, and IT Manager will work to time retirement or departure schedules to lessen the impact.

(4) DISASTER RECOVERY

The Coronavirus pandemic, the Ruso-Ukraine War, conflicts in the Middle East, and the post-911 environment all underscore the need for ongoing consideration of disaster and threat assessments. This includes the potential that state actors may launch even more sophisticated spear phishing and ransomware attacks. The Commission maintains a disaster recovery plan wherein a backup of the information on the Commission's computer network is maintained outside the Commission's physical office space. The state of New Mexico has also implemented new cyber security measures to protect state computer systems and networks. This includes protection of the Commission’s email accounts. The Commission will continue to monitor risk levels, and will implement new procedures or otherwise modify the disaster recovery plan accordingly.

(5) BENCH MARKING

The Commission seeks to provide persons who are blind or have low vision with meaningful employment, consistent with their “strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.” The Commission's vocational rehabilitation program consistently has a high average starting wage of consumers compared to the average state wage, and has a high percentage of consumers with competitive employment outcomes. With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Commission will now be measured in the same fashion as other workforce programs. The independent living and older blind programs are more difficult to measure as quantifiable measurements such as starting salary and employment outcomes are not available. The Commission continues to serve an increasing population of seniors who are blind or have vision loss. The Commission has implemented measurements that provide information as to how services are delaying or avoiding consumer placement in a nursing home, as well as reducing or eliminating reliance on Medicaid services.

(6) AGENCY GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The following goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the Commission for the Blind and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The goals and priorities were informed by public meetings held on March 9, September 19, September 23, and September 25, 2023. The goals and priorities were also based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment approved by the SRC on July 20, 2023, and reviewed by the SRC on August 31 and September 25, 2023. The goals and priorities were individually discussed and approved at meetings of the SRC held on April 6, July 20, August 31, September 25, and November 16, 2023.

A. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by proactively working to recruit, hire, and retain qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors, thereby providing for greater continuity and consistency in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

B. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to the growing population of older workers, many of whom will be unable or unwilling to retrain for work in a different field from their current occupations, thereby enabling these older workers to become or remain successfully employed.

C. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing appropriate vocational rehabilitation services that support the maintaining of a healthy lifestyle that is conducive to becoming and remaining successfully employed, thereby enabling a greater portion of our consumers to become and remain successfully employed.

D. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by providing vocational rehabilitation training and counseling that is designed to enhance and improve the soft skills of consumers, which are becoming an increasing barrier to consumers becoming and remaining successfully employed.

E. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and One-Stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

F. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

G. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of the apartment training facility constructed adjacent to the Center. The apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will reduce the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers.

H. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by creatively and innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of services to transition students.

I. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts, charter schools, private schools, Bureau of Indian Education operated and funded schools, and students who are home schooled.

J. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math, by increasing proficient use of Orientation & Mobility skills, and by providing services designed to mitigate any deficiencies in these areas that may be related to the pandemic.

K. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the "informed choice" provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation, focusing on areas in which employees are in highest demand BASED ON Labor market information.

L. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing a quality and expanding Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information, including through both local Newsline and through NFB-Newsline.

M. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of services to transition students, including those who attend home, Charter schools, private schools, and Bureau of Indian Education operated and funded schools.

N. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of services that are designed to remediate or mitigate any deficiencies in skills that may be related to the pandemic, and to take advantage of new opportunities for remote work.

O. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of increased remote employment opportunities, including opportunities in rural portions of the state.

P. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with Vancro Integrated Interpreting Services (VIIS), and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

Q. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using the Business Enterprise Licensee Training Program offered by the National Association of Blind Merchants at the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind.

R. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by enhancing overall performance and productivity by engaging in activities designed to mitigate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical community more aware of Commission services.

S. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

(7) AGENCY MISSION STATEMENT and OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

Our mission is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment, or to living an independent and meaningful life.

Overview

The Commission was created in 1986 with the passage of the "Commission for the Blind Act" Section 1 through 9 {28 7 15 to 28 7 23 NMSA 1978}. The Commission provides services to any qualifying legally blind and visually impaired citizen residing in the state of New Mexico.

The nature of the Commission's work is determined by the federal Rehabilitation Act, as well as the powers and duties set forth in The Commission for the Blind Act. The Commission for the Blind Act states that the Commission shall:

a. apply for and receive money from any state or federal agency to be used for purposes relating to blindness and receive on behalf of the state any gifts, donations or bequests from any source, to be used in carrying out the Commission's duties;

b. maintain a complete register of blind persons domiciled in New Mexico;

c. maintain bureaus of information and industrial assistance to help blind persons find employment, train them in work which may be pursued in their own homes and assist them in merchandising and marketing their goods;

d. establish, equip and maintain a center with qualified instructors for vocation, industrial and other training of eligible blind persons. The Center shall also provide for orientation and assistance for the adjustment of blind persons;

e. research and study the causes of blindness and its prevention in cooperation with the state or any other entity which the Commission deems appropriate;

f. cooperate with appropriate state agencies in the adoption and carrying out of preventive measures relating to blindness;

g. promulgate rules and regulations necessary to effectuate the provisions of the Commission for the Blind Act; and

h. publish an annual report on the activities and services of the Commission.

(8) AGENCY PROGRAM LISTING

Program Description:

Consistent with the federal Rehabilitation Act, the purpose of the Blind Services Program is to assist blind or visually impaired citizens of New Mexico to achieve appropriate employment and independent living outcomes.

Approved and electronically signed this 22nd Day of August 2024

Shirley Lansing

Chair

Commission for the Blind

Greg Trapp, J.D.

Executive Director

Commission for the Blind

Kevin Romero, CFO

Deputy Director

Commission for the Blind