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***This letter reflects the authorization for the committee as approved by Legislative Council at its meeting on April 24, 2015.***

**Requested by:** Representative Lee  
*With support of:* Senator Merrifield

**Re:** Request for interim study committee regarding vocational rehabilitative services for the blind

**Date:** 04/24/2015

### **Information Required Pursuant to Section 2-3-303.3, C.R.S.**

The Legislative Council approves the creation of an interim study committee to study vocational rehabilitative services for the blind through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) during the interim between the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions. The interim study committee is named the "Interim Committee to Study Vocational Rehabilitative Services for the Blind."

The Joint Budget Committee (JBC) is sponsoring Senate Bill 15-239, which concerns the transfer of vocational rehabilitation programs, including the business enterprise program, from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to the Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), effective July 1, 2016. The sponsors commend the commitment, evidenced by this move, on placing people with disabilities into competitive employment. However, in view of concerns about DVR's operations and delivery of vocational rehabilitative services for the blind, the sponsors requested the interim study committee be created, as described below. The interim study committee is to augment the quarterly reports from CDLE to the JBC, as required by Senate Bill 15-239. The work of the interim study committee is in addition to the other stakeholder outreach being done by the CDLE concerning the transfer of the DVR to the CDLE

**Scope of the policy issues to be studied.** In order to build a strong foundation for DVR in CDLE and improve accountability and the delivery of vocational rehabilitative services for the blind, the sponsors requested the creation of an interim committee to study the vocational rehabilitative services for the blind is appropriate. The interim study committee will determine the most effective structure and delivery model for vocational rehabilitative services and supports for the blind from the DVR within CDLE. Specifically, the interim study committee is mandated to make recommendations based on the following:

- the findings and recommendations of the November 2013 Legislative Audit, as those findings and recommendations concern the blind, including identification of “...*pervasive problems in the Program that raise questions about the Division’s oversight, system of internal controls, and culture of accountability*”;
- evaluation of the delays in delivery of vocational rehabilitative services to the blind;
- assessment of the efficacy of the application, receipt, and use of federal 1973 Rehabilitation Act “110” funding for the blind;
- consideration of any and all issues identified in the National Federation of the Blind Colorado Resolution 2014-11-2, Resolution 2014-01 (Attachment A); and
- consideration of any other issues related to the effective delivery of vocational rehabilitative services to the blind to assist them in obtaining job skills and long-term high paying jobs.

**Committee meeting requirements and structure.** The interim study committee should meet as determined by the interim study committee, but may hold up to **6 meetings** during July through November and report to Legislative Council by November 15, 2015. The interim study committee should hold a meeting on the Western Slope, possibly Grand Junction, or arrange for remote testimony. The interim study committee can refer up to **3 bills** to Legislative Council.

The interim study committee consists of **6 members**:

- 3 members of the Senate, with 2 appointed by the President of the Senate and 1 appointed by the minority leader of the Senate; and
- 3 members of the House of Representatives, with 2 appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and 1 appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives; and

When appointing the legislative members, consideration should be given to the membership of the committees of reference responsible for business, employment, and human services. The appointments must be made by July 1, 2015. The chair shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the sponsors suggest Representative Jessie Danielson be appointed as the chair of the interim study committee. The interim study committee shall elect a vice-chair from its members.

Nonlegislative members will not be appointed to the interim committee, but are encouraged to provide information, testify, and work with the committee. It is critical for stakeholders and activists in the blind community participate with the interim study committee. A task force is not necessary because of the work being done by the CDLE pursuant to Senate Bill 15-239.

### **Other Information Related to the Interim Study Committee**

Other agencies that may be called upon to provide assistance or information include: DHS; CDLE; Colorado Department of Education; Colorado Department of Higher Education; National Federation of the Blind; business advocates, such as the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, National Federation of Independent Business, and various chambers of commerce; and others entities as determined by the interim study committee.