

**Blind Industries &
Services of Maryland
Governor's Annual Report
FY 2020 (7/1/19-6/30/20)**

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Joint Message from BISM Chairman of the Board Walter A. Brown and President Frederick J. Puente

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (“BISM”) is honored to present its Annual Report for the Fiscal Year concluded as of June 30, 2020. This Report includes information on BISM’s manufacturing operations, facilities, employment, and independence training and rehabilitation programs. This report is submitted pursuant to Human Services Article 7-703 (h)(6) (MSAR #6071) and is prepared in accordance with Section 2-1246 of the State Government Article. BISM’s Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report is presented to The Honorable Governor Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr., the General Assembly, and the Honorable Clarence K. Lam and Carol L. Krimm, Co-Chairs of the Joint Audit Committee.

This Fiscal Year began very well. Then, the Covid-19 pandemic brought dramatic change. Overall, this has been an extremely challenging time, not only from a business perspective, but from emotional and physical perspectives. Our Associates, while proud to be “essential workers” during this difficult period, also were forced to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic - both personally and professionally.

Our Independence Training and Rehabilitation Department, through much of the Fiscal Year, was able to continue to provide the best training and programing for blind and low vision people in the State. It was limited in its ability to provide these services after March, 2020.

Even prior to the pandemic, BISM’s sales to its State of Maryland had been suffering. As we’ve previously reported, despite the procurement preference afforded to BISM, compliance by State agencies and State related agencies is spotty and unenforced. Once the pandemic hit and the “work from home” mandate was put into place, sales to the State, understandably, dropped to all-time lows. Despite this decrease in sales and the rising organizational costs due to minimum wage increases, increases in raw material costs, and unavailability of items, BISM is proud to declare “We are still here!” As you may imagine, this period has cause tremendous additional financial stress on BISM – making challenging financial times more challenging. Despite of all this, the Associates of Blind Industries and Services of Maryland continue to be totally committed to meeting or exceeding the requirements of our customers, clients and communities.

On behalf of BISM’s Board of Trustees, management team and Associates, we extend our genuine appreciation to Governor Hogan and the Maryland General Assembly for your continued support.

Sincerely,



Walter A. Brown
Chairman, Board of Trustees



Frederick J. Puente
President

BISM Board of Trustees and Leadership Staff

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Introduction: Blind Industries and Services of Maryland

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM) was established in 1908 by the Maryland General Assembly and has evolved into a multifaceted company that offers diverse employment opportunities and comprehensive rehabilitation programs and services for blind and low vision Marylanders of all ages.

BISM currently employs over 600 Associates, many of whom are blind or low vision, at thirteen (13) locations in four (4) states and Washington, DC. BISM's manufacturing facilities are located in Baltimore, Cumberland, Federalsburg, Salisbury (2), Hagerstown and Raleigh, North Carolina. BISM also owns and operates seven (7) AbilityOne Base Supply Centers on federal and military installations.

BISM manufactures various products at competitive prices for sale to its State of Maryland customers including: office paper pads; copy paper; paper towels; toilet tissue; janitorial/sanitation supplies, such as soaps and disinfecting chemicals; assembly services (better known as "kitting"); and custom label bottled water. BISM also produces cut and sewn textile products for the federal government, including uniforms for many branches of the United States military.

With regard to its workforce, BISM offers competitive wages, health and retirement benefits, and growth potential for our blind and sighted Associates. Our entire organization is built on the belief that every one of our Associates plays an integral part in our overall success. BISM has an uncompromising belief in the capabilities of people who are blind - every day we see that belief borne out in the accomplishments of our Associates.

With the funds generated by our manufacturing operations and with partial financial assistance afforded to BISM through a State Grant, BISM offers the highest level of training programs and services free of charge to blind and low vision Maryland residents. The Independence Training and Rehabilitation Department provides comprehensive blindness skills for adults, seniors, and youth. Our dedicated staff, most of whom are blind, teach Braille, Computer Technology, Independent Living, Orientation and Mobility, Job Readiness, and Woodshop in a classroom setting, and offer adjustment to blindness seminars, confidence-building group activities, home teaching, and workshops. Successful students leave BISM with the skills to enter the workforce and pursue a career, attend college, manage an active family, and contribute to the community. BISM works closely with Maryland state agencies, specifically the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS), and elected representatives to ensure that our Independence Training and Rehabilitation Department continues to effectively provide crucial services to the blind and low vision community.

Detailed Status of BISM – Fiscal Year 2020

(July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

Independence Training and Rehabilitation

The mission of BISM's Independence Training and Rehabilitation Department (ITR) is to provide blind and low vision people of all ages with life skills training that will lead to self-reliance and independence. BISM's training facilities are among the best in the nation and the programs are successful because our dedicated team of blind instructors serve as teachers, mentors, role models, and friends to the students.

FY 2020 was on track to be a banner year for BISM's ITR Department. We produced three solid quarters of quality blindness training throughout the State of Maryland. In March of 2020, BISM's ITR Department was forced to shut down its operations due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the three (3) quarters of operation, we continued to reach Blind Marylanders through our innovative youth, adult and senior programs. We took our services to the consumer's home, workplace, school, and brought consumers to one of our four training centers across Maryland. As the only agency in the State of Maryland using the structured discovery method of rehabilitation teaching philosophy, BISM provides students with the knowledge and skills that they need to live independent lives.

In FY 2020, BISM expanded our training programs by adding the WRAP program (Work Readiness Assessment Program). This program works one-on-one with Blind Maryland consumers who have been in the job market for an extended period of time. We work with these consumers for 80 hours, assessing all of their skillsets, conducting interviews, working on applications, resumes, and job search methods. At the conclusion of the 80 hours, BISM prepares a report with recommendations for areas of improvement to DORS. We also continue to follow up with consumers on a weekly then monthly basis to monitor their progress.

Of the 30 Marylanders who staffed BISM's ITR Department during FY 2020, twenty three (23) are blind (including six (6) Supervisor positions). BISM Rehabilitation staff provided 50,905 training hours to 560 blind individuals. Instruction and training hours were provided to adults (36,886 hours), seniors (12,949 hours), youth (560 hours), and in-home (368 hours). Programs also include support groups and community workshops.

Throughout the year, there were 120 referrals to our adult and senior blindness skills training programs and twelve (12) people completed BISM training programs. The youth division served seven (7) blind middle and high school students through both training programs and workshops.

These efforts resulted in ten (10) Blind Marylanders finding employment, one (1) entering college, and three (3) others entering the job market.

BISM's rehabilitation training programs and services are offered at no cost to adults and seniors who are Maryland residents. A percentage of the adult CORE and senior services programs are funded by a State Grant authorized by the Governor and overseen by Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS). BISM funds the majority of the ITR Department programs and services through the manufacturing and sales efforts of our BISM Associates.

A. Comprehensive Orientation, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment (CORE) Adult Program.

In FY 2020, 11 students successfully graduated or completed the CORE program to go along with three students who completed our Work Adjustment Training (WAT) program and are now employed.

The CORE program teaches blind and low vision adults the skills of blindness so they can become employed, pursue post-secondary education and regain control of their lives. Confidence building is an essential element of the program and is reinforced with each accomplishment. CORE students are taught by blind instructors and learn non-visual methods, both inside and outside of a classroom setting. The curriculum includes braille, long white cane travel, independent living, assistive computer technology, job readiness, woodshop, physical fitness, adjustment to blindness seminars, and off-site training. The CORE program generally requires eight to eleven months to complete.

CORE is a residential program and we consider residential living an essential component, designed to integrate skills developed throughout training. Students live in an apartment building at 300 West Lombard Street in downtown Baltimore City. They have easy access to every mode of public transportation offered by Baltimore and are two blocks from Camden Yards/Inner Harbor. This enhances the student's ability to master public transportation, build their confidence, and further develop their travel skills during practical applications. With two certified Orientation and Mobility instructors, the BISM CORE program is now a premier destination for those seeking cane travel instruction. Another benefit to apartment living is that the students are responsible for shopping, meal preparation, cleaning, and money management - all are essential skills of independence and career/personal development.

Students also organize and participate in community outreach, BISM activities, and group activities. This past year, CORE students participated in trips to New York City and Philadelphia to practice different public transportation systems. They also visited Ocean City, Maryland and had numerous excursions to restaurants in downtown Baltimore to apply skills acquired at BISM in real world settings. In addition to training in Baltimore, students spent two nights in a city they had previously not been to before to put the final polish on their travel skills. This has included trips to Las Vegas, Atlanta, Oklahoma City, Boston, Miami, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Richmond.

B. Senior Services

BISM Senior Services staff is devoted to helping Maryland seniors who are coping with vision loss. We provide training, services and resources at BISM training centers in Baltimore, Cumberland, Salisbury, the VA Hospital in Baltimore and a community site in Hagerstown. Programs for low vision and blind senior citizens are presented at no charge, which is a critically important factor for those seniors living on low or fixed incomes. The goal of all BISM Senior Services programs is to empower blind and low vision senior citizens with the skills and confidence necessary to live independently. Senior program participants become better equipped to manage their daily needs, remain in their own homes, return to work or volunteering, resume social activities, and enjoy life.

BISM Senior Programs include:

1. Seniors Achieving Independent Living (SAIL) - weekly training classes occurring in Cumberland, Hagerstown, Baltimore, and Salisbury. The SAIL curriculum includes classes in braille, cane travel, independent home living (with heavy emphasis on safe, nutritious cooking), computer and assistive technology, adjustment to vision loss, gardening and leisure activities, plus peer support, confidence-building outings and community integration. Students work towards personal goals for independence with training tailored to each person's real-life situation.

2. Senior Support Groups – occurring monthly in Cumberland, Hagerstown, Baltimore, Salisbury, and the Baltimore VA Medical Center. Our support groups were very active in FY 2020. They organized social events by working together on cooking and entertaining skills and traveled to local shopping venues, historical sites, and performing arts programs. Seniors made crafts and shared talents. At each location, thought-provoking discussions occurred with the goal of helping seniors adjust to vision loss and develop a positive outlook.

3. Home Instruction - statewide: Life skills instruction for blind seniors in the comfort of their own home. Staff members share resources, mark appliances, provide materials, and help families. Our home instruction services allowed BISM provide blindness skills training to every county in the State of Maryland.

4. Community Workshops - statewide: One-day workshops, on topics such as Independent Living, Adapted Technology, and Life Enhancement, are presented by senior staff throughout Maryland. These hands-on workshops encourage attendees to travel from station to station and use non-visual techniques (most for the first time) for cooking, labeling, and technology (phones, recorders, digital players, and talking devices). Seniors also learn about available resources and work in small groups.

In FY 2020, BISM provided 12,949 hours of training to seniors throughout the State of Maryland, and 354 blind and low vision senior citizens received blindness skills training. We provided 39 facility tours for senior citizens interested in attending BISM

training plus many additional tours for families, supporters, counselors, professionals, and large groups. BISM continues to expand our support group services across Maryland. Our support group focused on Blind Veteran's at VA Medical campus in Baltimore, Md continues to thrive.

Outreach, events, and presentations by senior staff reached over 1,700 seniors in FY 2020. Thousands more received information about BISM Senior Services through targeted media efforts, advertising, publications, company newsletters, special events, and the BISM website.

Sixty-seven (67) presentations took place at senior centers, assistive living and retirement communities, civic organizations, schools, helping agencies, and community low vision support groups. These presentations engaged blind seniors in conversations about alternative techniques and practical solutions for improved daily living, and BISM staff listened to the concerns and fears of the seniors and offered positive feedback.

C. Youth Services.

Typically, BISM would have conducted a seven (7) week Work To Independence summer residential program and an Independence 101 two (2) week program for middle school students. Blind staff would have provided students with mentoring and individualized non-visual life skills instruction in braille, technology, independent living, and travel. Students would have participated in several confidence-building activities, including out-of-town trips.

While we began FY 2020 with high hopes for the continuation of these programs and more, the Covid-19 pandemic forced BISM to shut down for the entire summer of 2020.

State Sales, Manufacturing and Production

BISM's Sales and Marketing team dedicates itself to offering high quality products at competitive prices and top-notch customer service to State of Maryland agencies, State-supported controlled entities, and commercial contractors. When State of Maryland customers purchase from BISM, they are helping to provide employment opportunities for blind and low vision Marylanders. BISM's product offerings include paper pads, 50% recycled content copy paper, hand soaps, sanitizers, a full line of janitorial chemicals, floor care products, medical exam gloves, can liners, toilet paper, tissues, paper towels, warewashing chemicals, bleach, and personal care products.

Fiscal Year 2020 began fairly well. For reasons discussed later in this Section, even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, our sales to our State of Maryland customers had been dropping. Nonetheless, BISM was able to continue to expand its position as a Co-manufacturer of GOJO/Purell products. Our Co-Manufacturing Agreement with GOJO/Purell is one of the few agreements GOJO/Purell has awarded in the country and it has allowed BISM to provide its State customers with the most up to date products and

solutions. BISM also continued to manufacture paper products in its Hagerstown, Maryland paper and tissue facility and to provide a host of other products from its Baltimore manufacturing facility.

Because of the seemingly sudden and uncertain nature of the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, in March, 2020, BISM almost doubled its average monthly sales of items such as gloves, masks, hand sanitizers, soaps and chemical disinfectants. To say our Associates worked incredibly hard to meet customer demand would be an understatement. The demand for products, especially in the early days of the pandemic, taxed our supply lines and inventory to the limit. We were very pleased, however, to find that our relationships and agreements our vendors and partners were strong and allowed us to fulfill orders when many others could not.

When the “stay at home” order was issued by the Governor, State business, essentially, stopped and it has remained that way through June 30, 2020. BISM continued to work to provide various, difficult to obtain products such as masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer for front line workers such as public transportation workers, correctional workers and the like, but the volume of these sales was significantly lower than BISM needed to sustain these businesses.

As we have previously reported, BISM has been afforded a procurement preference which requires the State or State aided or controlled entities to purchase products which are made or manufactured by BISM. Specifically:

1. State Finance and Procurement Article, Section 14-101, et seq. provides that, with regard to a State Agency, a “State Aided” or a “State Controlled” entity, BISM is a “Preferred Provider” for certain products.

2. Section 14-103(c): “To the extent practicable” a State or State aided or controlled entity shall include in a maintenance contract that has a component for housekeeping or janitorial services, a requirement that a prime contractor procure janitorial products from BISM when the products are “made, manufactured, remanufactured or assembled” by Blind Industries and Services of Maryland and are available”.

3. Pricing of the products is established by the Maryland Pricing and Selection Committee for Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, as set forth on the Maryland Master Product List and approved by the Maryland Department of General Services.

Despite the clear language and intent of this procurement preference (and the promises by State officials to assist BISM in this endeavor), compliance by State Agencies and State related agencies is spotty and unenforced. Almost every day, BISM representatives need to directly work to: (1) resist competition from commercial companies vying for State business; and (2) educate and inform various procurement officers from State agencies and State related agencies about the procurement preference and the overall social

bargain made between the State and BISM; and (3) to counteract the resistance of these same procurement officers and agencies who, despite their knowledge of the law, are determined to avoid compliance. Despite our requests and communications with State officials, there is currently no formal enforcement tasked with ensuring that State agencies and related entities comply with applicable State procurement laws. We need the help of the Governor to remedy this problem and we need it now.

BISM Beverage

BISM Beverage provides clear purified water to our State and Commercial customers in a variety of single serve BISM Now and custom label brand sizes.

As with BISM's other departments, sales in Fiscal Year 2020 began as expected but was altered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The commercial and State markets for BISM's single-serve bottled water was severely affected by the closures of entertainment venues throughout the State.

We have remained operational at our Federalsburg, Maryland location, where all of our bottled water is now produced. Our finished product is clear, purified water that is sold throughout the Mid-Atlantic region to mostly commercial customers. We produce our generic branded "BISM Now" water for our State of Maryland customers. All orders within Maryland are delivered with a sighted driver and a blind route assistant.

Maryland LIVE Casino continues to be our largest customer. BISM Beverage continues to work hard to add commercial customers from southern New York to the Carolinas to bolster our custom label water sales.

Federal Manufacturing and Production

BISM's blind and low vision manufacturing Associates consistently exhibit the dedication and craftsmanship that helps us meet the needs of an ever-changing marketplace, without sacrificing the quality of our cut and sewn products. We cut and sew uniforms for all branches of the U.S. military.

Fiscal Year 2020 was a lower than expected sales year for BISM's fabric cutting and sewing divisions, due to the impact of Covid-19, though all demands from a major federal customer were up from FY 2019. While demand increased, the impact of Covid-19 on attendance and employment was impactful. Improvements in supplier deliveries of fabric continued during FY 2020, which allowed BISM to manufacture in accordance to the customer delivery schedules. The volume of orders for these product lines were consistent with the capacity available.

BISM continued to benefit from an additional textile sewing operation at Federal Correction Institution (FCI) in Butner, North Carolina. BISM opened its operations at FCI Butner in 2015 under a program with Federal Prison Industries. FCI Butner

positively affected performance and allowed BISM more flexibility to compete in the commercial marketplace for fabric cutting services. Unfortunately, this operation was completely shut down in April 2020 and did not operate for the balance of the Fiscal Year due to Covid-19.

Demand for the Army Physical Fitness Uniform Jacket (APFU), Improved Physical Training Uniform Jacket (IPTU) and Extended Cold Weather Clothing System Jacket (ECWCS) for the federal government remained consistent in FY 2020. The sewing operations at Salisbury and Cumberland were on track and met all performance expectations for FY 2020.

Our Raleigh cutting and sewing division's performance was stronger in FY 2020 due to the production conversion to Army Combat Coat (ACU) production. The Raleigh location consolidation to a single product of production increased efficiencies at this location. Raleigh also cuts a variety of textile products for other customers.

AbilityOne Base Supply Centers

BISM owns and operates seven (7) AbilityOne Base Supply Centers (BSC) on federal military installations in Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia, and Kentucky. The AbilityOne BSC is a true one-stop shopping solution for our base customers by offering office supplies and furniture, cleaning products, tools, and military uniforms.

In an effort to satisfy customer demands, our e-commerce website, ShopBISM.com, offers over 80,000 office and janitorial supplies, next day delivery on most items, and free shipping on orders over \$50. The Dover Air Force Base AbilityOne BSC also operates the HazMart Pharmacy, where all items deemed as hazardous are managed by BISM Associates.

More than one-third of our BSC retail Associates are blind or low vision and these Associates play a pivotal role in all aspects of the operations. The BSCs are innovators in providing assistive technology tools for our blind and low vision Associates, including a computer magnification program known as ZoomText, CCTVs, wireless handheld talking scanners, and talking cash registers.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, our sales at the BSC Division were significantly impacted. FY 2020 sales for our BSCs were down almost 20%. We are hopeful that, by the Fall of 2021, we will be back to somewhat of a normal situation and that FY 2022 will be a rewarding year for the BSC division.

Human Resources

BISM's Human Resources Department is committed to the continued employment and growth of blind and visually impaired Associates in our administrative, manufacturing and retail facilities.

During the later portion of calendar 2020, BISM experienced unapparelled challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic. Where our industry saw mass layoffs and closings, as a critical infrastructure employer, BISM remained open to support our State and federal customers. BISM's manufacturing and industrial engineering department sprang into action to produce masks, as well as other products that were used in the war against the pandemic. It is noteworthy that BISM constructed one of the first blind sewing and assembly of facemasks in the U.S. at our Maryland locations.

BISM worked hand-in-hand with Maryland Transportation Authority to allow our blind Associates to continue to use Mobility services and the public bus systems. Without their cooperation and understanding, the impact would have been devastating. We also applaud the local County Health Departments, who worked with us as well to ensure our facilities were in compliance with CDC Guidelines and safe. Each County Health Department offered ongoing education and information on best-practices, as well as emerging information on how to stop the spread of the virus from community-spread at our manufacturing locations.

As much as BISM was busy, BISM did see a reduction in our blind employment due to safety considerations. BISM had no alternative but to suspend our Independence Training and Rehabilitation activities with students, both at our facilities and with our in-home instruction. An additional portion of our workforce, with a compromised immune system, were advised to stay home until a vaccine was available. During this period, we found and continued to have work, for every blind Associate who could and wanted to work.

BISM remains dedicated to the upward mobility, mentoring, and recruitment of blind individuals into leadership roles. We are actively looking within our organization as well as nationwide to identify blind people who hold the potential skillsets to lead BISM into the future.

Our focus is to remain safe, provide a safe workspace, and provide ongoing support to our Associates who are braving the world to come into work and produce products for our customers, as we all fight for the return of pre-Covid-19 lifestyles and opportunities.

Summary

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland continues to be the largest employer of blind and low vision adults in the State of Maryland. Our internationally recognized Rehabilitation and Independence Training programs and services develop the life skills that help blind people of all ages be more independent and successful in all elements of their lives.

We appreciate the support from the Governor's Office, the Maryland Legislature, and State agencies, and we look forward to creating more opportunities for blind Marylanders in the future.