



Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 201
Henrico, VA 23229-5012

Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
November 1, 2023

Members Present:

Karen Engelhardt, Chairperson
Carl Cline, Jr., Vice Chairperson
Traci Branch
Chris Gregory
Kristin Karmon
Andrew Nash
Tim Patterson
Susanne Wilbur
Cathee Wolford

Members Absent:

None

Staff Present:

Eric Raff, Director
Karen Brimm, Interpreter Services Manager
Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program Manager
Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager
Felecia Smith, Virginia Relay Manager

ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:

Lois Boyle, CART writer
John Folker, Interpreter
Elaine Hernandez, Interpreter

On Wednesday, November 1, 2023, the members of the Advisory Board of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) convened in the conference room at the VDDHH Central Office, 1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203, Henrico, Virginia 23229-5012.

CALL TO ORDER

At 10:02 a.m. Chairperson Karen Engelhardt called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

Introductions were made for the members and staff present. Cathee Wolford, who works for the Community Services Board in Hampton as Deaf Regional Coordinator/Counselor, was welcomed as a new board member.

Director Raff will work on updating the roster. Communication rules were reviewed. There were no changes to the agenda.

Minutes from August 2023 were reviewed, and a motion was made to approve with no changes (Cline/Karmon). Motion passed by consensus.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Director Raff reviewed the legislative process by Power Point presentation to acquaint the board and to help the members learn what their responsibilities are. In the upcoming year (2024), the legislative session will have a long session (60 days).

Director Raff reviewed the basic structure of state government, legislation, public policy and rulemaking. The legislative sessions are fast paced; therefore, the General Assembly staff needs to be very quick about contacting VDDHH for interpreters. The General Assembly has its own captioning service. VDDHH is unique in that it coordinates interpreters for all three branches of the state government (executive, judicial and legislative).

Director Raff encouraged the board to become familiar with the General Assembly website (www.viriniageneralassembly.gov) which informs the public about daily schedules, bill tracking, budget details and streaming links to the floor. A flow chart was provided to members which indicates how a bill becomes a law. Director Raff reviewed the General Assembly committee structure, how to provide public comment, and contacting legislators. The Assembly never closes during session and conducts business on holidays and during inclement weather.

VDDHH's role –Many people do not understand that VDDHH has a limited role when submitting bills. VDDHH can do that, however, the request has to go through an approval process with the Health and Human Resources Secretariat, then it is submitted to the Governor. With approval, VDDHH can lobby for its own agency bills but cannot lobby on other bills.

Because the board members are appointed by the governor, they are, as a board, working for the Governor and must follow his positions. The board itself, though, as a group, cannot lobby, but as individuals, if a board member has concerns, then they can meet with their own legislators to discuss them. Advisory board members can lobby as individuals, but not as a collective board.

During the legislative sessions, VDDHH can be asked to write a Legislative Action Summary (LAS) and summarize what the pros and cons are for a particular bill. It is internal communication for the governor and HHR. All government agencies communicate up the chain of command if they have any concerns or any problems, or if they support or do not support different bills. There is a financial impact statement to show any costs associated with a bill. There is an enrolled bill review to ensure that any changes made during the crossover are analyzed and edited before it is submitted to the governor. VDDHH can be assigned as a lead agency, meaning that it is the only expert on the content of the bill, resulting in a more active role. VDDHH can be assigned as a back-up to another lead agency and provide comments. The process is fast-paced, and an agency has 24 hours to respond. The future plan is for the Policy Analyst to take on some of this legislative-related responsibility within VDDHH.

Generally, there are approximately three to five bills that impact the deaf and hard of hearing community. An enrolled bill review means the bill passed both the House and Senate and deaf-related enrolled bills are rare. Board members can use the General Assembly website to track bills. The first ten bills can be tracked for free and anything over, then person has to pay. Director Raff actively monitors bills, reviews committee and subcommittee meetings, and the dockets.

Director Raff reviewed the VDDHH legislative proposal to bring the interpreter pay for civil commitment on par with spoken languages, which are paid by the hour. Right now, sign language interpreting is capped at a flat rate of \$75 and includes a lot of paperwork.

Director Raff explained that legislators do not have time to develop a relationship with their constituents during sessions, so it is important to talk with them in ahead of time and educate them about general issues related to hearing loss and garner their support. Director Raff asked for advance notice of legislative proposals from the deaf/hard of hearing community. A chart was reviewed entitled, "Process to Develop Policy."

The chairperson asked members about issues in their respective areas. Chairperson Engelhardt shared that concerns are data centers and women's reproductive rights. Mr. Cline commented that many elected officials are retiring, and people will fill those shoes who may not be experienced in healthcare issues.

The chairperson raised the question - How can members help VDDHH during the legislative process? Director Raff asked for support of the agency's bill and to talk with their respective representatives. Also, board members can provide public comments at the committee or subcommittee level. Individual stories may have more of an impact on legislators than petitions. Board members can also seek information about the Disability Commission, and present as an individual citizen, not on behalf of the board. VDDHH can add board members to the legislative

bill watch with permission. The General Assembly is coming up soon and it is beneficial for the board to know the process ahead of time.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC)

Lauren Snyder Roche, SILC Administrator, presented an overview of the SILC by Power Point which was included in the meeting packet.

Ms. Wolford asked about the age in which transition starts, per independent living services. Ms. Roche responded that there are no age limits.

BOARD REPORTS/WORKING LUNCH

Mr. Gregory reported that he is a long-time musician and lost his hearing from 50 years in the music business. Recently, he was asked to play in a Jimmy Buffet tribute show. Members suggested that he would be a wonderful advocate for musicians with hearing loss. A resource was shared, Association of Adult Musicians with Hearing Loss.

Ms. Wolford comes from a deaf family and currently works at the CSB located in Newport News and is getting the word out about deaf/hard of hearing/deafblind services. Ms. Karmon asked if the services are only for adults. Ms. Wolford responded that she serves adults and teenagers and is under the supervision of a LCSW currently and performs the same work.

Ms. Wilbur reported on the domestic violence and sexual assault program in Charlottesville which recently received additional federal funding for three years.

Mr. Cline reported on his invitation to serve on the board for Roanoke Valley Speech and Hearing and has attended one meeting so far. He reported on the work of the Blue Ridge Partnership at the Carillion Clinic to develop a pipeline of students to go into healthcare-related fields. Discussion ensued about how to reach out deaf/hard of hearing students and include them in the program. ADARA and AMPHL (www.amphl.org) were suggested as resources.

Ms. Branch commented about her role in DARS and the importance of pre-employment transition services for deaf/hard of hearing youth through mentors and early exposure to careers. She applauded Mr. Cline for his efforts because there are very competent deaf and hard of hearing individuals that could be wonderful healthcare workers. The role of DARS is twofold – educate both individuals and hospitals. Currently there is a vacancy for a Regional Counselor for in Southwest Virginia. Her agency is struggling also to obtain qualified interpreters as the pool has become smaller and the competition has increased. The board will need to stay current on interpreting issues and how to grow the field because of the needs and missed opportunities.

Dr. Nash reported that he has become more involved with HLAA in Virginia Beach which is trying to get more people involved for Veterans' Day. He will be giving a lecture on veteran access to hearing healthcare services and could share pamphlets with the group. The meeting will be held in person and via Zoom with captions.

Ms. Engelhardt asked the members for creative approaches for educational interpreter development. Ms. Brimm shared that educational interpreters across the state of Virginia can take advantage of the educational interpreter grant through Department of Education which each region having its own grant administrator. Regional efforts would require coordination and creativity among school systems.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

PROGRAM REPORTS

Interpreter Services - Karen Brimm, Manager

Promoting Equity in Healthcare (PEHI): Karen Brimm has been involved in the project run by Idaho State University which is a five-year grant, and they completed our first year. We are finishing up five pilot cohort participants and starting on another group of five participants, with a total potential of 15 to 20 Virginia interpreters who will receive training in medical interpreting.

Karen Brimm is working on the Support Service Provider (SSP) Pilot Project which is a two-year grant that provides community access to deaf-blind participants. She is developing grant reports for the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and filling in for the Community Services Program.

Ms. Brimm is taking an online training to obtain credentials for Virginia QAS testing administration (6 month, self-paced). It is from Institute for Credentialing Excellence: Certificate Program for the Credentialing Specialist. Karen Brimm wants to be a good steward of the credentialing program at VDDHH, and to ensure that the assessment is valid.

Interpreter services (IS) coordination – The bulk of the requests are connected to court proceedings and IS has improved its percentage of satisfied requests. Ms. Karen Brimm mentioned our involvement in the PEHI grant can help pay for professional development and training to legal interpreters and hopefully, VDDHH will add to the list of interpreters who can do this work.

CART coordination – Ms. Brimm explained that it is challenging to find onsite CART services for courts due to a limited number of CART providers and some courthouses not being equipped

to handle virtual services. At times, the request cannot be satisfied, and the courts must then postpone cases. We are trying to think creatively on how to recruit more CART providers.

To help the community in their search for qualified interpreters, the public can now access the informational flyers which include hyperlinks. Three VDDHH staff members attended the RID bi-annual conference held in Baltimore over the summer.

VDDHH submitted two proposals to the General Assembly. First, Karen Brimm submitted a proposal for a new full-time position for a staff interpreter. The second request is to change some of the code language that will help to fill requests for temporary detaining orders interpreter services. It was successfully submitted, and we are still waiting to hear back on two items.

Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) – there was a slight decrease due to COVID and candidates having to test every three years. We expect an increase during this quarter. VQAS continues to develop a new version of the performance assessment and hope to release it in the spring of next year.

The board had a question about educational interpreters also working as a freelance interpreters. Karen Brimm explained educational interpreters can be freelance interpreters who work for agencies, and they can also contract with a school district, but not be considered staff or employees.

There was a discussion about minimum qualifications. The Department of Education has set minimum qualifications but there is no statewide license. School systems set their own criteria for hiring so there can be a disconnect. Some schools hire with less than the minimum and the provisional is valid for two years. Question about who holds the schools accountable? Director Raff responded that VDOE does not have an enforcement role. Parents and communities need to be empowered to ensure that their school boards are following state regulations.

Executive – Eric Raff, Director - Director Raff

Staff update – Last summer, we hired Melissa Forkner (Deaf Mentor Coordinator) and Adam Drake (SSP Coordinator). Both are part-time positions. We are currently recruiting for Community Services Manager and a Policy Analyst. We recently hired Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialist for the Richmond area.

Lease update – DARS will release an RFP to obtain competitive bids for the office space. The current lease ends in June of 2025. When VDDHH moves to a new facility, we will experience some disruption to services. A question was asked if the board could write a letter about its concerns?

Virginia Higher Education Accessibility Project (VHEAP) – Currently there are seven vendors who provide closed captioning via statewide contracts. A flyer was released to executive agencies encouraging them to use the VHEAP contract which includes in-person and remote CART, postproduction video captioning and audio description.

VDDHH submitted a budget proposal for a staff interpreter which was approved by the HHR Secretariat. Next the Department of Planning and Budget and the Governor's office will review and approve. We will not know of the decision until the Governor's proposed budget bills are released in December.

Community Services - Deaf Mentor project is recruiting for more mentors to work with families. SSP services have not started as we are finalizing the contracts next week.

Virginia Relay – Felecia Smith, Manager

Department of Social Services (DSS) – VDDHH is providing training for DSS call centers (which are contractors) about how to handle relay calls. Four trainings have been completed with one left. Felecia Smith noted that she, Brittany, and Paul Stuessy provided detailed and comprehensive training for the five regions.

Virginia Relay was approached by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality because the agency wants to make sure the deaf and hard of hearing are aware of the initiatives and services provided by the agency. Ms. Smith provided DEQ with information and resources on interpreter services, and explained if consumers have an on-line webinar, they can request remote conference captioning (RCC) services as well as Relay Partner training.

Ms. Smith noted that there were multiple Relay Partner trainings in Quarter 1 which she handed off to the new Hamilton Outreach Coordinator.

Felecia Smith has been responsible for 9-1-1 Call Center trainings, getting Text to 9-1-1 up and running, and standardizing the trainings.

Ms. Smith has been invited to speak at the APCO/NENA conference in the spring which will include other 9-1-1 organizations in the area. This will help build communication among other 9-1-1 centers in Virginia and elsewhere.

Analog to digital transition – The Relay numbers continue to decrease, with only slight fluctuations, as the analog lines are transitioned to digital. TTYs will not work once the copper analog lines are phased out. The Relay and TAP programs are working to figure out how to gently but urgently convince consumers to consider other options to their TTYs, such as RTT. TTY users will have to transition to a tablet or a cell phone. TAP plans to add tablets to the

distribution program and the TTY customers will be the priority. The tablets are expensive, and TAP will have to work within budgetary constraints.

Question raised – Which localities have Text to 9-1-1? There is a flyer that has a link to a dashboard under the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), but it is still a work in progress and has not been updated. Director Raff is working with Dorothy Spears, the State Manager of 9-1-1 at VDEM. The 9-1-1 call centers are expected to update their information called the Next Generation 9-1-1. It is important to know if an area has Text to 9-1-1 and test it well ahead of an emergency.

Question – Why was there a decrease in RCC requests? With the COVID restrictions being lifted, people are back to having meetings in-person. Ms. Smith responded she will release a flyer to inform people about RCC. It is being used more by professionals such as outreach coordinators, specialists, etc.

Question about staff turnover at DSS and how to ensure that new staff are trained? Ms. Smith responded that the trainings were recorded and available through a portal for continuity. We will repeat the trainings as frequently as needed to ensure that access is available.

Universal Telecommunications Access Platform (UTAP) – Four states are involved and addressing two key issues: 1) deaf people having multiple phone numbers depending on the type of technology; 2) RTT to replace TTYs. The states are working closely with Hamilton and will find some consumers who are willing to use the app on their phones. On the RTT side, we will be using the tablets from TAP with current consumers and having them test the functionality of the RTT replacement for TTY.

Director Raff noted: We are in contact with the Department of Planning and Budget to rebalance special funds and allow for usage for education and outreach to help consumers prepare for analog to digital transition.

Technology Assistance Program - Brittany Howard, Manager

New hire for Region 7 (Richmond area) is Ms. Mina Tucker, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist.

Felecia Smith and Brittany Howard took a TAP retreat in September to discuss the future of TAP. They planned out their budget for future equipment purchases and how to make the most of the funds given to them. They drafted the next RFP request for proposals for TAP and Relay specialists. Next, they talked about how the consumers and specialists will be changing from analog to digital.

Tablets – TAP seeks to partner with Empower 360. There are two options through that organization– tablets or reduced cost for internet services, which would be a hard decision for some consumers. TAP will add tablets to the program while developing a voucher for \$11 for consumers for tablets who apply through Empower 360.

Question about the type of tablets - Brittany Howard explained we will purchase iPads first and then the next quarter we will purchase Androids. The tablets are compatible with consumers' phones particularly going from analog to digital.

Demonstration – Brittany Howard demonstrated the recently-added, digital alarm clock from Serene Innovations that have large display pictures and can make announcements in other languages. The components can be silenced as well, and the accessories are compatible with previous versions.

Brittany Howard said she has increased the TAP equipment for the deafblind community. For example, the CapTel 880i has a bigger screen to see captions. She asked the board for suggestions for equipment for deafblind individuals.

To ensure that the TAP database has the highest security level possible and adheres to VITA standards, all users must now sign in using an additional step.

Regarding the recent DSS trainings, TAP has set up a system for loaner equipment, similar to what TAP does for the courts, and ships personal amplification devices as a temporary solution. The devices can be shipped through Ms. Howard with a two-week notice or through a regional D/HH Specialist with less notice. Some DSS offices would rather purchase their own equipment, and Ms. Howard helps to connect them to resources.

Ms. Howard attended the TDI Conference in July. TAP hosted the first quarterly meeting of this fiscal year with D/HH Specialists. Graphs and pie charts were included in packet.

Question – How to provide training on a statewide basis, especially as new equipment is added to TAP? Ms. Howard explained that she usually sends out training resources and offers to meet virtually. She hopes to arrange an in-person meeting during the next fiscal year. Ms. Smith acknowledged and praised the work of Ms. Howard for covering Region 7 during the position vacancy and meeting distribution requirements while doing her own job as TAP Manager.

NEW BUSINESS

Director Raff explained about the possibility of hosting a retreat for VDDHH Advisory Board, staff, and contractors to discuss the strategic plan, legislative issues, budget/funding, mission statement and vision, which are outdated. The participants would have a conversation about

VDDHH programs and services, and other potential areas to address to close services gaps. Other state models can be used as comparisons such as North Carolina, Minnesota, and Massachusetts. North Carolina passed a law to fund its services through the telecommunication tax and provide one hearing aid to all residents who need them.

Discussion about the use of social media as an outreach tool to describe services and what is being offered. Concerns were raised about using personal pages on social media and the overwhelming amount of information.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

The travel forms were distributed and signed by the members requesting reimbursement for those members who travel more than 50 miles. Overnight guests will also be reimbursed for meals at the per diem rate. Travel expenses must be both reasonable and necessary to conduct official state business.

Next meeting will take place on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at VDDHH. Subsequent meeting dates for 2024 are May 1, August 7, and November 6.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

Being that there was no further business before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m. (Patterson/Cline).