



**Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**  
**1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203**  
**Henrico, VA 23229-5012**

**Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**  
**February 2, 2023**

**Members Present:**

Roy Martin, IV, Chairperson  
Carrie Humphrey, Vice Chairperson  
Carl Cline, Jr.  
Chris Gregory  
Tim Patterson  
Karen Engelhardt  
Susanne Wilbur  
Kristin Karmon

**Members Absent:**

Traci Branch (excused)

**Staff Present:**

Eric Raff, Director  
Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager  
Karen Brimm, Interpreter Services Manager  
Felecia Smith, Virginia Relay Manager  
Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program (TAP) Manager  
Lynn Odom, Community Services Manager

**ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:**

Lois Boyle, CART writer  
Bernice McCormack, Interpreter  
Elaine Hernandez, Interpreter

**NETWORKING – COFFEE & REFRESHMENTS:**

On Wednesday, February 1, 2023, at 9:30 a.m., 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 10:00 a.m., Chairperson Roy Martin called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

- A. Review of communication rules: raise your hand and wait to be recognized which will ensure a pause between conversations and help our CART provider and our interpreters. and allow a smooth transition of the communication.
- B. Introduction of Advisory Board members, VDDHH staff, and guests: Introductions were made for the board members and staff present.
- C. Review of Advisory Board membership roster: Chair requested that any changes to the roster be submitted to him for revision by the end of the meeting.
- D. Review of agenda: Agenda was review, no objections expressed.
- E. Approval of the minutes: Minutes from November meeting reviewed. Motion to approve minutes as presented: Karen Engelhardt, seconded by Carl Cline.

**Program Reports:** (see also Program Reports submitted to the Board)

Executive – Eric Raff, Director

Director Raff noted the following personnel related items: **A)** VDDHH continues recruitment for the Administrative Assistant position, with an emphasis on seeking applicants with secretarial skills. Interviews were conducted, the position was offered to a candidate, but it was declined. Until that position is filled, Linda Thornton has graciously come out of retirement to cover the duties on part time basis. **B)** VDDHH hired Sharon Ellis-Sandoval for the position of Deaf Mentor Program coordinator (wage position that started January 25, 2023). **C)** The DHH Specialist wage position for Region 5 (Chesapeake) has been filled by Karen Rhoads who will start on February 10, 2023. **D)** The SSP Pilot Project, delayed for several years due to the Pandemic, will be hiring an SSP coordinator during the first quarter of the project. Recruiting for the policy analyst position is expected to begin sometime before the end of FY23.

Regarding prospective renovation plans for VDDHH's main office suite: plans have been put on hold. Clean-up and disposal of outdated and inoperable equipment and furniture will be wrapped up in March 2023.

The SSP Pilot project has begun, with planning and curriculum development underway including drafting of a Coordinator job description. Hiring for that position should commence soon. Grant partners and community stakeholders will be meeting in March.

The Deaf Mentor project started in earnest in November and continues to develop; Deaf mentors (13 at present) have been trained in the SKI-HI curriculum, and planning and coordination is ongoing. Families have expressed interest, and there is the possibility of the need for a waiting list.

VDDHH planned to host its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration with an event tentatively planned for March 25, 2023, at the Library of Virginia. This event planning is on hold, and it is likely that it will be postponed to a later date or canceled considering staff heavy schedules.

The VHEAP initiative regarding captioning access for institutes of higher education resulted in the release of an RFP, producing a list of vendors for onsite and remote live captioning services as well as postproduction captioning. These vendor contracts can be used by any Virginia state agency as well.

VDDHH continues to participate in the Promoting Equity in Healthcare Interpreting (PEHI) grant which is a 5-year project administered by Idaho State University.

VDDHH continues to participate in a workgroup resulting from the passing of HB 649 related to language assessment for Deaf and hard of hearing children, and the development of tools and resources for parents of DHH children to support children's language acquisition. The workgroup also includes, among others, Terri Nelligan from the Dept. of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

HHR Secretary Littell has established the Language Access Project which includes VDDHH and DMAS among other agencies. The group aims to improve language access and website accessibility for people with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency. Sec. Little will be joining our board meeting later to give an overview of his secretariat priorities.

Sec. Littell's office has also been conducting Listening Sessions and agency head meetings on the topic of improving access to behavioral health services; VDDHH recommended some participants who are DHH subject matter experts whose contributions to the discussions were much appreciated by the HHR staff. Access to behavioral health services for DHH consumers has long been an overlooked area of need.

#### Virginia Relay – Felecia Smith, Manager

Ms. Smith provided an update on the Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC); there are still four vacancies on the Council despite recruitment efforts, and so meetings are on hold pending the establishment of a quorum. A decision as to whether to disband this advisory council may need to be made should VDDHH be unable to secure new members in the foreseeable future, while still recognizing that gathering stakeholder feedback and informing users about industry and technology changes remains important to the success of VA Relay.

Ms. Smith noted that program outreach remained active in the past quarter. The Hamilton Relay statewide representative, Eric Alvillar, will be relocating to a new position out of state, so a recruitment and hiring effort will begin to fill that position as soon as possible. Already-scheduled outreach events will be covered by managers and DHH specialists.

Hamilton Relay continues to perform adequately. Relay traffic was slightly decreased compared to the prior quarter, and Remote Conference Captioning (RCC) traffic has decreased markedly compared to this time last year. That decrease was to be expected as the state transitioned out of COVID pandemic. Ms. Smith worked with VDDHH's ISP Coordinator to ensure that any CART request that came in will be evaluated as to whether it would instead be appropriate for RCC so that utilization by state agencies is maximized.

VDDHH/VA Relay is working with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) regarding the Digital Equity Act. Transitions from analog to digital will impact users, and it will be important to alert those traditional relay users prior to service changeover to prevent service disruption. DHCD is unable to share personally identifiable information with VDDHH and vice versa, so the approach will be for DHCD to make VDDHH aware if a particular geographic area will be experiencing

significant service disruption or upgrades, and VA Relay and TAP managers will make attempts to raise TAP consumer awareness in those areas.

Regarding the printed Virginia Relay quarterly newsletter which is printed as a hard copy and mailed to the TAP user distribution list; it is uncertain whether this format for messaging is effective, and a QR code incentive that was printed on the most recent newsletter received no customer engagement hits. It is possible that it would be a better use of funds to either cease or continue to reduce the volume of printing of the newsletters and transition to some other more effective method of consumer contact. Board members and Director Raff commented that although an online method may work for some people, not everyone uses or has access to the internet for digital engagement. Certain apps have been recently banned for state government use, and not everyone is on Facebook although that remains VDDHH's main way to post information to the community online. It was noted that perhaps a combination of analog and digital approaches may be needed. Ms. Humphrey suggested the creation of an infographic for distribution by school counselors to reach the younger groups and their families, and Ms. Odom suggested adding TAP information to the recently created Over-the-Counter hearing aid information packet that CSP gives out since that topic is of interest to the community now.

#### Technology Assistance Program - Brittany Howard, Manager

VDDHH has recently hired for the Region 5 D/HH Specialist position which is an update to the previously submitted TAP quarterly report. Karen Rhoads will start in that position on February 10, 2023.

TAP reports have been recently consolidated and revised for greater accuracy and efficiency. Ms. Smith and Ms. Howard are working together, along with DARS IT, to create current user lists that are more accurate than in the past, and Hamilton Relay is creating a postcard to assist with TAP renewal recruitment efforts. The TAP database also now has a checkbox for noting which consumers have digital infrastructure in their area and which do not.

All the DHH specialists have been provided with a consumer interaction script to assist them in their one-on-one consumer engagement since some of them expressed insecurity in the past as to how to effectively interact with consumers at various events. TAP also created a few table displays as a pilot effort to make information and application materials more visible and easier for community partners to display in their offices. If any board member would like a display or knows where one may be posted, please let Ms. Howard know and they can be provided. TAP is also working with DARS IT to develop an online application which may make it easier for some consumers to enroll in the program.

Although at the last board meeting it was mentioned that TAP was making efforts to add tablets to the program, that effort has been paused to do more market comparison research with technology assistance programs in other states. VDDHH wants to benefit from their wisdom and experience to make it more likely that a tablet launch will be successful. At the board's request, Ms. Howard has developed a list of available communication apps that can be given out to consumers as a resource (such as diction apps for instance) and will continue to add to that resource as other apps are developed or presented. Consumer feedback strongly indicates that updated equipment inventory is desirable, and new hardware options will likely improve enrollment numbers in the future.

TAP continues to work DARS procurement to solve contract renewal issues and is operating on an emergency contract extension until the end of the calendar year. It will be necessary to resolicit for bids through a new Request for Proposal (RFP) since the prior RFP process has been deemed insufficient. This will also give VDDHH the opportunity to improve and update the Scope of Work for vendor performance expectations to increase consumer engagement minimums.

Interpreter Services Programs - Karen Brimm, Manager

We continue to participate in the PEHI grant project, the five-year grant project with Idaho State University. We do have a cohort of Virginia participants who are completing the online training right now, and we're soon going to be working with the project team to start identifying several interpreter mentors (experienced and likely nationally certified medical interpreters). Virginia will not likely have a cohort during the next grant year but then we would have another cohort start the following cohort year. So that would give other states the opportunity to have candidates participating. Altogether the program has about 15 candidates in various states at any one time. It also gives us a chance to make sure that we've done our wrap-up activities with the existing cohort like providing feedback etc.

ISP is working on fliers with basic interpreter related information for various settings, and those are still in the drafting stage. We intend to print a small number of hard copies and post the digital versions online for download.

Ms. Brimm was invited to present to the HHR Sub-Panel of the Governor's Secure and Resilient Commonwealth Panel to provide a summary of her activities as Access and Functional Needs Officer during the COVID-19 response. Interdepartmental and collegial relationships and networking done during that period has hopefully strengthened VDDHH's profile, and accessibility efforts during that time resulted in improvements while raising awareness that much progress is yet to be made. Website accessibility, sustaining of accessibility efforts, and communication accessibility continue to be areas of need as of the end of her service in the role.

Regarding interpreter coordination, we are maintaining a stable 92% request satisfaction rate thanks to the freelance interpreters on our Service Agreement and who accept work under our court system MOU, but the scarcity of available and qualified interpreters continues to be a growing issue especially for legal interpreting. Over the course of the late summer and early fall of 2022, ISP presented six times to court related groups to educate them on ISP processes and resources, and we worked with the Office of the Executive Secretary to complete the MOU update including a long overdue per hour rate increase for legal interpreting work. We also hope to provide some legal interpreting training in the future to begin to support the development of prospective and current legal interpreters. The court system independently decided to fund several interpreter and CART positions, and we contributed to those job descriptions and will be included in the interview and selection phase, although no candidates have been brought to our attention thus far. ISP would coordinate their active interpreting time.

Regarding assessment, VQAS slots are consistently filled, although demand was down probably because of the winter holidays. We also anticipate a decrease in the number of interpreters who will be testing in the first half of 2023 due to the impact of the COVID hiatus 3 years ago which has interrupted some candidate's typical retesting cycles, but also realize that there will be a corresponding uptick when the 3-

year anniversary of the COVID backlog occurs. Development of the new VQAS performance materials continues with the launch of a new version of the test slated for some time during 2023. The VDOE grant which supports the VQAS was officially reissued at the amount requested (level set amount as directed).

Community Services – Lynn Odom, Manager

Ms. Odom reported that although I&R, education and training goals are being met or exceeded, there has been a decline in requests for presentations, so CSP is working with TAP to identify more presentation opportunities. Calendar-year internal key performance measures were significantly exceeded. Inquiries about TAP remain the most prevalent, and we have seen an increase in requests for information regarding the OTC hearing aids. Information on that has been added to our existing Hearing Aid Packet resource. Database improvements continue which will result in improved reporting capabilities and require some addition D/HH Regional Specialist training. The design and launch of a new and improved website are still in the approval phase due to internet security vetting. Efforts to increase online engagement through Facebook and e-News bulletins are ongoing, with the hope of increasing those numbers.

Regarding the Deaf Mentor Program, the coordinator position has been filled by Sharon Ellis Sandoval and she will start on February 10, 2023. So far 13 Deaf mentors have been identified. The SKIHI training is planned for February 2023. Regarding the SSP pilot project, Director Raff shared that update during his report.

**Guest Speaker:**

**John Littel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources (HHR) for the Commonwealth**

Sec. Littel thanked the board members for their service, and for the invitation to speak. He commended Director Raff for his repeat appointment under successive gubernatorial administrations, which is a relatively rare occurrence in Virginia politics, and for his service to the community.

Sec. Littel gave an overview of the structure of the HHR Secretariat and noted that it comprises about a third of the state budget at approximately \$24 billion, much of which are Medicaid funds. His office consists of two deputy secretaries and a CFO (the CFO position is new.) One of the policy analysts, Calvin Hobbs, also has conversational ASL skills, so that has been an asset to the office. The Governor has made mental health services a priority in his administration because was a topic that came up repeatedly during his campaign from constituents across the state, but it is a difficult goal to tackle due to the complexities involved and despite bipartisan support. Efforts at present mainly involve prevention, maintenance, and intervention efforts, as well as post-crisis recovery resources. Sec. Littel hopes for an emphasis on a person-centered approach that addresses the continuum of care, an understanding of individuals' mental health journeys in all their variations, and recognition that people with disabilities often struggle to navigate the complexities of the mental healthcare system. The national 988 suicide hotline has also begun providing more general mental health information and resources along with crisis support. The administration has developed six pillars of programs and activities to do over the next three years, including the addition of \$430M specifically for behavioral health initiatives, and the Governor requested to increase that by another \$230M. There is the hope to reduce the waiver waiting list for people with developmental disabilities, which is about 3000 people long, and the hope to bolster non-law enforcement involved crisis care to reduce involvement of the criminal justice system for people with

mental health issues. There is also a great need for more care providers including doctors and counselors, etc. Mental health needs for younger people have increased and needs to be addressed as well.

The administration has worked with Senator Deeds and the mental health commission to create a plan and sent out a survey which received 2,900 responses which provided stakeholder input. Lack of language accessibility is recognized as a significant systemwide impediment, and Director Raff has been involved with the language accessibility related workgroup meetings conducted so far. Document and website accessibility are areas of concern along with direct communication in languages other than English when trying to access services.

Ms. Wilbur commented that as a Deaf mental health professional herself she appreciated the Secretary's comments and attention to the topic and expressed concern and frustration about many of the points mentioned, and excited at the prospect of improvements and funding. She also mentioned that the Community Service Boards are often a bridge to services but often struggle to provide communication access and wished there were a way for them to collaborate with private practices and non-profits who have Deaf, signing staff, and which already absorb much of the service burden pro bono. Medicaid and Medicare benefit restrictions also inhibit the hiring of interpreting services, and providers who are skilled at communicating with Deaf and hard of hearing people are scarce. Ms. Brimm commented that funding and support for providing training in mental health and medical interpreting would benefit the system by increasing communication access service availability, and to ensure that interpreter services can be paid for.

- **Board member reports** were offered during the Working Lunch

**Chris Gregory:** Nothing to report.

**Karen Engelhardt:** Attended a silent dinner in the Gainesville, VA, area near Washington, D.C., and several educational interpreters attended who as well were interested in resources for learning up-to-date signs for current cultural references and slang terms that would be appropriate for use while interpreting for students. They showed an interest in workshops on that topic so Ms. Engelhardt may work on developing or setting those up.

**Suzanne Wilbur:** Her ongoing project related to domestic violence and sexual assault has added an additional year.

**Kristen Karmon:** Grafton Infant Program (early intervention) is trying to establish a hub for regional infant programs; this may be relevant to the Deaf Mentor program once that is up and running.

**Tim Patterson:** Nothing to report.

**Carl Cline:** Notes that in his area of Franklin County the school system superintendent is stepping down and search is beginning for a replacement. Additionally, his hospital recently hired a new speech therapist. The hospital has just completed a year-long renovation project that includes increased size and number of operating rooms, and two new procedure rooms. New services in that facility include Auditory

Brainstem Response (ABR) diagnostic equipment to detect hearing loss, which means that availability for that test will involve reduced travel time for families. An ENT office will also be relocating to the hospital from the Smith Mountain Lake area, and there has been a marked increase in the number of surgeons available at the hospital (from four a year ago to around 22 currently).

**Carrie Humphrey:** 1) Working with the Opening Doors Unlocking Potential (ODUP) annual conference committee to provide CEUs for their workshops through VRID, and hoping to make sure that workshops for educational interpreters are included in the lineup. 2) A small group formed called Virginia Sign Language Assessments (DSLAs) to provide the SLPI which assesses sign language fluency. A website has been set up and the hope is to provide the interview to high school students, people teaching ASL, etc. to verify their language skills for school or employment purposes. Will be working with colleges and universities to use the interview results as a potential way to “test out” of beginner level language classes. 3) Carrie recently became president of VRID and will leading her first board meeting this weekend. She has started to post General Assembly updates for members to be informed about bills that pertain to the industry or field (for information purposes only, no lobbying permitted). 4) There has been a need expressed by the interpreting community for training and professional development for interpreting specialization including legal and intermediary (Deaf interpreter) interpreting. 5) Outside of VRID there has been a grassroots mentoring group growing which hopefully will eventually utilize the free mentoring toolkit and curriculum developed under the federal grant work conducted by the CATIE Center in Minnesota. 6) Reynolds Community College is working on becoming a test site for the EIPA and the NIC, with scheduling cooperation from VDDHH so that both sites can complement each other and avoid competition. We are also interested in the possibility of gaining access the Texas BEI test, but it isn’t known yet if that is possible. We have also established an occasional ASL Game night to promote social interaction with the signing community and provide language exposure for our students. There is no ASL club at present since membership, volunteer officers, and activity ceased shortly before COVID. We will also hopefully be establishing a signing community calendar through Reynolds’s website to be able to gather event information for enrichment purposes.

**Roy Martin:** Nothing to report.

### **Additional Reports:**

#### **Brittany Howard (TAP Manager): Regarding the Communication App resource**

The board requested that TAP create a resource document which lists and describes commonly used apps for smart phones and digital devices that can provide effective communication assistance on demand, such as for captioning, dictation, video relay or video remote interpreting, etc. That resource has been created and is ready for review and editing. The document also includes some speech aids for individuals with speech impairments, and some emergency preparedness apps that may be of use to residents who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Several D/HH Regional Specialists contributed their input, and Ms. Howard would be particularly interested in feedback as to the desired title for the document. A copy of the draft is in each of the Board Member folders.

**Rhonda Jeter (Business Manager): 2023 Fiscal Year Update**

Ms. Jeter provided a general overview of the structure of the VDDHH budget, including General (from the General Assembly), Special (via communication and sales and taxes and fees collected), and Federal funds (via VDOE, VBPD, and PEHI grants mainly) which support the various programs. Very rarely there are also privately donated funds available for specific purposes. VDDHH receives fiscal office support from DARS through an MOU, and the full-time budget analyst assigned to the department is Rita Alston. Ms. Engelhardt commented that she thought the Special Funds amount would be higher than mentioned, and Ms. Jeter explained that the amount of that fund is largely determined by the Virginia Relay allocation given to the state from the federal level. There was discussion regarding which programs were budgeted through which funds, and relative amounts necessary to run the various programs (TAP, VA Relay, ISP, VQAS, and CSP, including staff salaries and benefits). Money from one fund cannot be transferred for use in another fund, but reallocation within a particular fund can be approved if needed. Funds are typically ‘use or lose’ meaning that unspent funds are not held over for use in the following year. VDDHH is currently approved for 11 full time equivalent (FTE) positions and several part-time wage positions. FTEs can only be added through a proposal and approval process through the General Assembly. Currently 9 of the 11 FTEs are filled.

- Recess

(Ms. Jeter resumed reporting) VDDHH is included in a lengthy budget bill along with all the other state agencies and departments. Director Raff comments that compared to North Carolina, for instance, VDDHH is very small; NC has 90 full time staff across their state and a much larger budget allocation through various types of funds. The only way to make a significant change in the way our agency is funded would be for constituents to raise the issue with their legislators. VDDHH and its Advisory Board (as an entity) cannot lobby for this type of change. Individual constituents can lobby privately. Unlike DARS and DBVI, VDDHH does not receive a large federal budget allocation because there is no specific law that requires fiscal support for Deaf and hard of hearing related programs, whereas there are for vocational rehabilitation programs and programs for individuals with vision impairments. The TAP/Relay funds are required, but those amounts have not been increased over time to keep up with the cost of living and technology upgrading. VDDHH must be creative, strategic, and frugal in order to operate on its existing budget.

**New Business:**

Regarding the impending end to Mr. Martin’s and Ms. Humphrey’s terms on the Board; Mr. Martin encouraged current member for submit their names for election to Chair and Vice Chair, commenting that the roles require only minimal work and consistent meeting attendance. Director Raff assists with assembling the agendas, the staff assist by compiling reports and creating Board Member packets.

Future meeting dates have been established; speakers from TAC-D/HH and VDOE have been asked to return to present again at future meetings on relevant topics.

**Legislative Update from Director Raff:**

Several DHH related bills have been heard so far in the current General Assembly (starting Jan 2023) including one with direct impact to interpreter service coordination of ASL-English interpreters for the

Virginia Court System; the bill proposes that local courts could identify interpreters on their own if VDDHH is unable to identify an available and qualified interpreter for a particular hearing. This is concerning since local court clerks are not subject matter experts and may engage interpreters who are not qualified. VDDHH is working with HHR's legislative liaisons to mitigate the negative impact of this proposed legislation should it go forward and be signed into law, including proposing amendments that might provide minimum quality control requirements through VDDHH.

Another bill has to do with acceptable terms and terminology used to refer to the topic of disability and to people with disabilities, mostly regarding the developmental disability or DD waiver system.

There were requests for the opportunity to make a Public Comment.

Rhonda Jeter asked board members to make sure their address is correct on their travel voucher, and that mileage is documented correctly. Ms. Jeter also requested to be made aware of potential future requests for hotel reservations for Board Members to attend future meetings. Thanks to everyone who submitted a Conflict-of-Interest form. Also be aware that all Board Members are required to take the FOIA training available online. However, be aware that it isn't captioned, and the transcript is in very small print. There was discussion as to how to object to the lack of accessibility, Director Raff said it is allowable for the Board to submit a Letter of Complaint.

**Meeting Adjournment:**

Being that there was no further business before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 2:35pm.