



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

**Advisory Board Meeting Minutes via Zoom
February 3, 2021**

Members Present:

Traci Branch
Karen Engelhardt
Shantell Lewis, Au.D.
Roy Martin, IV
Timothy Patterson
Susanne Wilbur, LCSW
Jason Zuccari

Members Absent:

Carrie Humphrey
Colin Wells

Staff Present:

Eric Raff, Director
Clayton Bowen, VDDHH and Relay Consultant
Karen Brimm, Community Services Program (CSP) Manager
Pamala Dorman, Interpreter Services Program (ISP) Specialist
Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program (TAP) Specialist Coordinator
Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager
Virginia Melville, Administrative Assistant
Paul Stuessy, Community Services Specialist
Elaine Ziehl, Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Coordinator

ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:

Bernadette Mayhall, Interpreter
Amanda Wharton Stacey, Interpreter
Rhonda Tuck, Cavalier Reporting

Guests:

Eric Alvillar, Hamilton Outreach

- 1 On Wednesday, February 3, 2021 at 10:04 a.m., the members of the Advisory Board of the
- 2 Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) convened virtually for a
- 3 quarterly meeting via Zoom. The meeting was recorded for general public viewing at a later time
- 4 (<https://youtu.be/0WfudNb7WM0>).

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I. CALL TO ORDER

At 10:04 a.m., Chairperson Traci D. Branch called the meeting to order. Carrie Humphrey and Colin Wells were absent (excused). A quorum was established with seven members present and the meeting proceeded. The Chairperson reviewed the communication rules for the meeting and shared that public comments can be sent to info@vddhh.virginia.gov.

There being no recommended corrections or changes, a motion was made by Mr. Martin, seconded by Dr. Lewis, and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as written.

The Board reviewed the meeting minutes from November 4, 2020. Dr. Lewis asked if the computer assisted real time (CART) transcript could be used as the minutes because she noticed that a lot of what she reported on at the last meeting was not included. She also asked if the link for the YouTube session and the email address for the public comments could be added for reference because the meeting was being recorded. Rhonda Jeter said that the minutes are a summary and not a verbatim report, but she tries to make them as concise and comprehensive as possible. Information can be added and the minutes can be corrected at any time. Dr. Lewis would like the board to decide if it would like to include the CART transcript that has all the information there. Mr. Martin suggested that the CART and Zoom transcripts could be utilized and posted for reference to the minutes. Director Raff asked for feedback from the board when the minutes are sent out. Director Raff stated that he appreciated the feedback and the discussion. When the minutes are sent out, the members can reply back with any adjustments that they may have. The CART transcript is a public record and is available upon request. The motion to approve the minutes was tabled until the board reviews the revisions and approves it.

II. PROGRAM REPORTS

A. Executive – Eric Raff, Director. VDDHH is still following the stay at home order, and hopefully, staff can be back in the office by the fall. VDDHH first used YouTube Live in November to broadcast the Advisory Board meeting. There were challenges and problems with connections, captioning, spotlighting and visibility of the interpreter. VDDHH learned a few tips and tricks so that this meeting will run more smoothly. Hopefully, the next Advisory Board meeting will be in webinar format which will improve accessibility. When the board goes back to in-person meetings, VDDHH will still use Zoom for people to have access to the meetings from across the Commonwealth. From here on out, VDDHH will be recording the board meetings then uploading the recordings to YouTube for others to view.

The General Assembly convenes for 30 days in odd years and with the last summer’s special session, it should finish up on February 11. Director Raff has monitored the bills and there are no bills that directly impact deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Some bills related to disabilities in general in regard to special education and accessible parking. It is his understanding that deadline for introducing new bills have passed.

VDDHH requested small increases in two areas of its budget. VDDHH proposed an increase in appropriation of federal funds to allow funding for both the VQAS through the Virginia Department of Education, and the Support Service Provider pilot project through the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities. VDDHH also asked for an increase in special funds because the demand for relay services increased since last spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

52 Currently relay expenditures are over-budget, and VDDHH requested an increase to
53 accommodate for the overspending in relay services. The budget bill is still in General Assembly
54 legislative session and Director Raff is monitoring it.

55
56 Regarding human resources at VDDHH, Leslie Hutcheson recently retired as the Interpreter
57 Services Manager. Pam Dorman is working to coordinate interpreter services for the state
58 agencies, and VDDHH is thankful for to both of them for their hard work. Two rounds of
59 interviews were held for the Interpreter Services Manager position and hopefully, an
60 announcement will be made later on this month once VDDHH chooses a new person to take over
61 the Interpreter Services Program.

62
63 B. Virginia Relay – Eric Raff, Director. Director Raff thanked Clay Bowen for his help while the
64 Relay Manager position is vacant. VDDHH is still recruiting for the Relay Manager position and
65 also will have two Deaf and Hard of Hearing regional specialist positions available in Richmond
66 and Fredericksburg. Both specialist positions are a work in progress and hopefully, the three
67 positions will be filled in the spring.

68
69 VDDHH has seen an increase in relay calls last spring due to the pandemic. While that has
70 started to level off, VDDHH continues to see an increase in Remote Conference Captioning
71 (RCC). VDDHH needs to improve public awareness about this service, for example, frequently
72 asked questions, because RCC is very popular. VDDHH has two contracts with Hamilton the
73 relay provider. Hamilton provides Captioned Telephone Service (CTS) and the contract will
74 expire in April. The Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) is responsible for the
75 Request for Proposal (RFP). Director Raff and Clayton Bowen have been helping to write the
76 RFP and VITA will extend the CTS contract for several month.

77
78 The Virginia Relay will be 30 years old in March. VDDHH has been trying to figure out how to
79 have a celebration of sorts in light of COVID-19. It has not been decided yet and VDDHH will
80 continue to work with Hamilton.

81
82 Eric Alvillar is doing a lot of promotions for the Virginia Relay, especially virtual conferences
83 and meetings. He also provides training to businesses when they sign up to become a Virginia
84 Relay Partner. VDDHH works with Hamilton on various marketing projects, for example, there
85 was a recent promotion through transit and Remote Area Medical (RAM). RAM is not
86 happening at this time due to COVID-19, but there are now 10,000 subscribers in Virginia
87 through the RAM mailing list. VDDHH also has a radio advertisement.

88
89 C. Technology Assistance Program – Brittany Howard, TAP Specialist Coordinator. There were
90 no questions from the board about the TAP reports provided in the packet of information. Ms.
91 Howard reported that TAP is constantly learning about and researching new equipment that is
92 being released and updated. While researching devices, TAP learned that three current devices
93 have been discontinued: the Strobe Trine doorbell, PowerTel 760 amplified phone, and HD40-S
94 phone with outgoing speech amplifier. TAP is looking for suitable replacements for these three
95 devices. TAP recently sent out doorbells to ten evaluators and after that evaluation is completed,
96 TAP will sent out Serene cellphone amplifiers. If any board member is interested in evaluating
97 devices, please send an email to Christine Ruderson. Ms. Wilbur is interested.

98

99 TAP implemented a new consumer satisfaction survey, focusing on the level of satisfaction with
100 the equipment and services along with the opportunity for additional feedback. The responses
101 have been great. She encouraged the board members to review the results of the consumer
102 survey, including comments that were provided. VDDHH and TAP specialists are doing a great
103 job.

104
105 TAP is working with Atos Medical, maker of electronic larynxes, to provide a workshop to
106 discuss TAP and the equipment available as well as other agency services. Atos will actually
107 provide a course that will give speech language pathologists CEUs towards their licenses. TAP
108 has done this type of workshop in the past and it has increased the number of requests for
109 electronic larynxes. In 2018, TAP distributed six electronic larynxes, and that increased to 26 in
110 2019. In 2020, during the pandemic, it distributed 24, and as of January 2021, TAP has already
111 distributed five. The workshop has been successful in getting information about TAP and Relay
112 out to the community.

113
114 TAP is getting ready to provide training to one of the new specialists in the Region 3 area. TAP
115 just entered into the second year of the new TAP and Community Service contract, which is
116 going well. Due to the pandemic, there have been some things to overcome and adjust to. As a
117 response, we have decreased the required amount of consumers that each specialist needs to
118 serve, and most of the office have become by appointment only. Walk-ins are not being taken at
119 this time to allow time for planning for safety precautions, sanitizing, etc. TAP is still keeping in
120 touch with the contractors by hosting Zoom meetings to provide new information or to discuss
121 anything that is going on in their regions.

122
123 C. Virginia Quality Assurance Screening – Elaine Ziehl, VQAS Coordinator. The program is
124 going well. Ms. Ziehl had originally planned to retire at the same time as Ms. Hutcheson, but has
125 decided to stay on. As a result, two new people will not have to catch-up following a seven-
126 month suspension of testing. VQAS reported that it has caught up with the seven-month
127 suspension in four to five months. Additionally, VQAS routinely tests interpreter training
128 program students from J. Sargeant Reynolds and Liberty University and the results need to be
129 turned around quickly in order for them to obtain their semester grades and to qualify for
130 different activities. All the students got their grades within the appropriate time frame, and the
131 training programs have made VQAS a part of their curriculums. This is an ongoing process but
132 VQAS has caught up. Ms. Ziehl has talked to Boys Town twice about reestablishing the
133 Educational Interpreters Proficiency Assessment (EIPA), and is awaiting a decision. Boys Town
134 is very strict about the proctoring of their assessments, and Ms. Ziehl has already completed the
135 process to be able to actually administer the EIPA written and performance exams. Ms. Ziehl
136 plans to be here through June and will make sure that the new person is comfortable coming in
137 when everything is in good shape, as it should be.

138
139 D. Community Services Program (CSP)– Karen Brimm, Community Services Program Manager.
140 Ms. Brimm reported that she and Paul Stuessy have been working mostly from home and go to
141 the VDDHH office only when required. The Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) field specialists have
142 been conducting community services program related activities as best they can at the discretion
143 of their contract holders. Most have not gone to face-to-face events because most organizations
144 have transitioned to online events. The work looks significantly different since the pandemic hit,
145 and they are figuring out different way to do business.

146
147 Ms. Brimm and Director Raff continue to be involved with the Statewide Interagency Team
148 (SIT) with the current focus on analyzing feedback from the town hall activities and the
149 comments received. The project has been long, due to the amount of data to go through. Ms.
150 Brimm and Mr. Stuessy also contribute to the Regional Interagency Team (RIT) meetings in
151 Northern Virginia and Central Virginia to touch base with the professionals working in those
152 areas. An overarching factor is mental health and isolation, with mental health care and crises are
153 kind of on the rise, as we are in a long term, highly stressful situation. She urged everyone
154 participating and watching the board meeting to take care of themselves.

155
156 CSP has been involved with the ICAN accessibility program related to survivors of domestic
157 violence, specifically survivors who have disabilities, and worked with the project as the staff
158 developed training modules and content related to protective orders translated into American
159 Sign Language (ASL). The DHH Specialists have participated and watched training modules,
160 which TAP coordinated. This is valuable education for them to know how to handle a situation if
161 someone discloses domestic violence and where to obtain resources.

162
163 As Director Raff stated earlier, the budget side of the Support Service Provider (SSP) grant from
164 the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities is being addressed. This pilot project was given a
165 green light, and was supposed to start in January 2020. Because of COVID-19, VDDHH asked
166 for an extension because this type of training cannot be compromised and done in a virtual
167 setting because the deafblind community and SSPs need and deserve to have full-fledged
168 training with face-to-face interaction, which right now is not safe. VDDHH hopes to start the
169 grant activities in January 2022.

170
171 Ms. Brimm continues to contribute to various boards, work groups and task forces in a virtual
172 environment, such as Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI), No Wrong Door and the
173 Health and Human Resources Sub-Panel - Governor's Secure and Resilient Commonwealth
174 Panel. CSP has also supported interdepartmental projects, including collaborating with the
175 Department of Elections to create an ASL version of their voter pocket guide. CSP provided the
176 COVID-19 communication card and created a black and white version, based on feedback from
177 the community, which is posted on the COVID-19 resources page on the VDDHH website. In
178 January CSP reached out to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) because it realized that
179 there was no vaccination information available in ASL either from the Centers for Disease
180 Control or at the state level. CSP collaborated with VDH to translate the information into ASL
181 and released a preliminary version. Since then, some of the vaccination information has changed,
182 so CSP will continue to update as needed. Ms. Brimm hopes to continue the interdepartmental
183 partnerships past COVID-19 and assist them in making their content more accessible. CSP
184 continues to provide information about the Virginia Relay, remote call captioning, clear face
185 mask availability and reasonable modifications.

186
187 A huge part of Ms. Brimm's daily work since March 12 has been emergency management
188 through her role as the Access and Functional Needs Officer. Because of networking during
189 COVID-19 in emergency management, she has been able to provide information about
190 improving their accessibility and to educate fellow professionals. Recently she has been involved
191 with vaccination-related activities, such as the Vaccination Advisory Committee, and with VDH
192 in preparation for training their people to work at vaccination sites, e.g., making sure that

193 training includes accessibility and interaction, and ensuring that registration tables have
194 communication kits for individuals who have disabilities or do not speak English as a first
195 language. Ms. Brimm was humbled to be included in a group that was recognized for the
196 Governor's Honor Award this year with a Health Equity Leadership Task Force through the
197 Unified Command. She was the only person included in the group that addressed accessibility
198 which is extremely important right now because during COVID-19, providing information is
199 lifesaving. It was a huge honor for Ms. Brimm and a great win for VDDHH. Hopefully,
200 VDDHH is not the best kept secret anymore.

201
202 Ms. Wilbur comment that as a member of the deaf community, there have been many people
203 trying to educate different agencies and now we have a win. Her concern is how can VDDHH
204 make sure that these recognized efforts are continued and maintained, going into the future. Ms.
205 Brimm responded that this has been an opportunity to create systems change, and it is not just
206 during COVID-19, and that when the state of emergency goes away, accessibility does not. She
207 pledged to do her best to insist that this level of accessibility achieved is maintained and
208 improved on, rather than going back to not providing accessibility on a daily basis, which is not
209 acceptable.

210
211 E. Virginia Relay Outreach, Eric Alvillar, Outreach Coordinator. It has been almost a full year
212 since Hamilton has stopped doing in-person outreach, and a lot of efforts have moved into virtual
213 form. Mr. Alvillar has been providing various presentations regarding Relay Partner training,
214 telecommunications relay services and CapTel information, using Zoom and Microsoft Team.
215 The amount of attendees has increased. Virtual trainings have made a difference for him rather
216 than traveling around the state. He has attended a lot of conferences and put information on the
217 conference websites, so that if anyone is interested, they can send an email to him directly or to
218 the Virginia Relay.

219 220 **III. Board Reports**

221 There were no board reports.

222 223 **IV. 2021 Election of the Officers**

224 Chairperson Branch explained that Article VI of the by-laws state that officers serve for two
225 years. She has served as the chairperson, and Dr. Lewis has served as the vice chairperson, since
226 November of 2017. A 2019 vote was needed for new or continuing officers for 2020-2021. She
227 asked for a vote for the chairperson and vice chairperson to continue through November 2021.
228 Director Raff explained that the VDDHH and the board overlooked the opportunity to have an
229 election. The board will need to get caught up and back on track for the remainder of 2021. This
230 is the second year of a two-year term, and the board did not vote their support for them the first
231 time around. This action needs to become official and kept up to date in order to comply with the
232 by-laws. Dr. Lewis asked, and it was clarified by Director Raff, that the board is voting for the
233 chairperson and vice chairperson to continue until November 2021, then another election will
234 take place in November 2021 to vote for incoming officers to serve two years (2022-2023).

235
236 A motion was made by Ms. Wilbur, seconded by Mr. Martin, that the current chairperson and
237 vice chairperson will continue until November 2021, followed by elections for the following two
238 years. Motion passed unanimously.

239

240 **V. Public Comments**

241 Chairperson Branch asked for any public comments received by email at
242 info@vddhh.virginia.gov. Mr. Stuessy reported that no comments were received from YouTube
243 Live or through info@vddhh.virginia.gov.

244

245 **VI. New Business and Future Meeting Agenda**

246 Chairperson Branch asked the board for any new business or additions to the agenda for the next
247 meeting. If something should come up in the community, members may contact Director Raff
248 with anything to have presented on the agenda for the board to discuss.

249

250 **VII. Adjournment**

251 There being no further business before the board, a motion was made by Mr. Patterson, seconded
252 by Mr. Martin, to adjourn the meeting.

253

254 The meeting adjourned at 11:34 a.m.