



**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>).

5  
6 **I. CALL TO ORDER**

7 At 10:04 a.m., Chairperson Traci D. Branch called the meeting to order. Carrie Humphrey and  
8 Colin Wells were absent (excused). A quorum was established with seven members present and  
9 the meeting proceeded. The Chairperson reviewed the communication rules for the meeting and  
10 shared that public comments can be sent to [info@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto:info@vddhh.virginia.gov).  
11

12 There being no recommended corrections or changes, a motion was made by Mr. Martin,  
13 seconded by Dr. Lewis, and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as written.  
14

15 The Board reviewed the meeting minutes from November 4, 2020. Dr. Lewis asked if the  
16 computer assisted real time (CART) transcript could be used as the minutes because she noticed  
17 that a lot of what she reported on at the last meeting was not included. She also asked if the link  
18 for the YouTube session and the email address for the public comments could be added for  
19 reference because the meeting was being recorded. Rhonda Jeter said that the minutes are a  
20 summary and not a verbatim report, but she tries to make them as concise and comprehensive as  
21 possible. Information can be added and the minutes can be corrected at any time. Dr. Lewis  
22 would like the board to decide if it would like to include the CART transcript that has all the  
23 information there. Mr. Martin suggested that the CART and Zoom transcripts could be utilized  
24 and posted for reference to the minutes. Director Raff asked for feedback from the board when  
25 the minutes are sent out. Director Raff stated that he appreciated the feedback and the discussion.  
26 When the minutes are sent out, the members can reply back with any adjustments that they may  
27 have. The CART transcript is a public record and is available upon request. The motion to  
28 approve the minutes was tabled until the board reviews the revisions and approves it.  
29

30 **II. PROGRAM REPORTS**

31 A. Executive – Eric Raff, Director. VDDHH is still following the stay at home order, and  
32 hopefully, staff can be back in the office by the fall. VDDHH first used YouTube Live in  
33 November to broadcast the Advisory Board meeting. There were challenges and problems with  
34 connections, captioning, spotlighting and visibility of the interpreter. VDDHH learned a few tips  
35 and tricks so that this meeting will run more smoothly. Hopefully, the next Advisory Board  
36 meeting will be in webinar format which will improve accessibility. When the board goes back  
37 to in-person meetings, VDDHH will still use Zoom for people to have access to the meetings  
38 from across the Commonwealth. From here on out, VDDHH will be recording the board  
39 meetings then uploading the recordings to YouTube for others to view.  
40

41 The General Assembly convenes for 30 days in odd years and with the last summer's special  
42 session, it should finish up on February 11. Director Raff has monitored the bills and there are no  
43 bills that directly impact deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Some bills related to disabilities in  
44 general in regard to special education and accessible parking. It is his understanding that  
45 deadline for introducing new bills have passed.  
46

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **III. Board Reports**

There were no board reports.

### **IV. 2021 Election of the Officers**

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

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

240 **V. Public Comments**

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