



**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**  
**November 4, 2020**

**Members Present:**

Traci D. Branch  
Karen A. Engelhardt  
Carrie N. H. Humphrey, NIC  
Shantell D. Lewis, Au.D.  
Roy B. Martin, IV  
Timothy R. Patterson  
Susanne B. Wilbur, LCSW

**Members Absent:**

Colin H. Wells (excused)  
Jason M. Zuccari

**Staff Present:**

Eric Raff, Director  
Karen E. Brimm, Community Services Manager  
Leslie G. Hutcheson, Interpreter Services Manager  
Rhonda S. Jeter, Business Manager  
Christine C. Ruderson, Technology Assistance Program Manager  
Paul Stuessy, Community Services Specialist  
Virginia Melville, Administrative Assistant

**ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:**

Laurie B. Malheiros  
Bernice McCormack  
Rhonda D. Tuck, Cavalier Reporting

1 On Wednesday, November 4, 2020 at 10:01 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 streamed to YouTube for general public viewing.  
4

5 **I. CALL TO ORDER**

6 At 10:01 a.m., Chairperson Traci D. Branch called the meeting to order. A quorum was  
7 established with more than five members present. The communication rules for the meeting were  
8 reviewed. The Chairperson welcomed new member Karen A. Engelhardt, who was an Outreach  
9 Specialist in Northern Virginia from 1991-1997. She is a business owner and mother of two. All  
10 other members and staff present were welcomed and introduced themselves.

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

The Board reviewed the meeting minutes from February 5, 2020. The motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Mr. Martin, seconded by Ms. Wilbur, and unanimously passed.

## **II. PROGRAM REPORTS**

Executive and Virginia Relay: Director Raff reported that most of the VDDHH staff is running the office virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the projects continue. A lot of services were placed on hold temporarily. He recognized outgoing Advisory Board member, Kathi Mestayer, who served for eight years as the representative for the hard of hearing, and welcomed new member, Ms. Engelhardt.

The Statewide Interagency Team, consisting of representatives from the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), Valley Community Services Board and VDDHH, held town hall meetings across Commonwealth, and the last meeting scheduled for Staunton in March was cancelled due to the pandemic. Public comments from the area were accepted by other means such as email and video. SIT will be reviewing all comments from the town hall meetings and setting new priorities (subject to stakeholder feedback), along with a written report in 2021.

Director Raff reported as the acting Virginia Relay Manager about the current state of relay services. The Director recognized Clayton Bowen for his work with relay responsibilities, and his help in the search for a new Relay Manager. Due to the statewide hiring freeze because of the coronavirus, the position has not been filled, but VDDHH plans to re-advertise and hopes to fill the position in 2021.

With the onset of the pandemic, relay usage has surprisingly increased with more people staying at and working from home, thus making more calls. Hamilton Relay continues to meet the federal requirement of answering calls within 10 seconds, even as relay agents have been working remotely. The FCC waived the 10-second requirement and will double the delay until 2021, meaning the calls may take longer for agents to answer and facilitate. There has been an increase in the use of Remote Conference Captioning (RCC) as more deaf and hard of hearing people participate in Zoom, WebEx, Google and other virtual platforms. As a first, the costs of RCC has surpassed the cost of traditional relay services. VDDHH will continue to monitor costs as it has obviously impacted the budget, and ensure that all costs are covered.

Interpreter Services Program (ISP): Leslie Hutcheson, Interpreter Services Manager, reported on the impact of the state of emergency on interpreter programs. ISP has been arranging interpreters for the Governor's press briefings and was able to have consistent teams due to weekly press schedules. ISP was successful in setting up video remote interpreting (VRI) with an addendum to the existing service agreement. As a result, more jobs are being covered without the travel time. VDDHH will probably look into continuing the VRI option for interpreters under the service agreement beyond the COVID-19 state of emergency.

There have been challenges in providing communication access in the courts during the state of emergency, because many cancellations and subsequent rescheduling of the same cases occurred under 30-day judicial orders. The amount of work that was required is not reflected in the database, and those numbers may be under-represented. Pam Dorman is doing a stellar job in keeping up with the increased volume of the cases.

Other challenges include the increased use of CART services in the courts and shortage of providers. The ISP worked with the Supreme Courts to allow VRI with WebEx in court cases and attorney-client meetings.

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program has worked to schedule assessments that were halted early in the pandemic and resumed in early August. VQAS decided to extend expiration dates to allow time to restart the testing. Interpreter training program students who attend Reynolds Community College and Liberty University were also scheduled as they need to complete the assessment as part of their curriculums. VQAS completed all of the assessments that were prioritized. Laurie Malheiros has been administering the assessments as a contractor and is doing excellent work. Elaine Ziehl and Leslie Hutcheson will be retiring as of January 1, and because the hiring freeze was lifted, VDDHH hopes to hire a good team.

There was a change in the rating process from sending out DVDs to the raters to using a private YouTube channel, and this has resulted in a lower turnaround time for test results. VQAS is looking into the Texas Board of Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI), as a recognized credential and the possibility of administering the test in Virginia. The Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) has not resumed because VQAS is focused on scheduling assessments for those with QAS levels expiring through the end of the year. Ms. Hutcheson thanked everyone for their support throughout her years at VDDHH and with the Advisory Board.

Community Services: Karen Brimm, Community Services Program Manager, reported. The Community Services Program (CSP) has been involved with the ICAN accessibility project which addresses domestic violence and is a partnership between the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) and Virginia Commonwealth University. VDDHH assisted in developing ASL versions of the needs assessment and protective order brochure.

The start date of the pilot project for Support Services Providers for deafblind consumers has been postponed until January of 2022 due to the pandemic. The grant, awarded by the VBPD, will include partnerships with DBVI and Reynolds Community College.

Information and referral, and outreach trainings are continuing in Community Services. CSP requested proclamations from the Governor's Office for Deaf Awareness Week, Speech and Hearing Month, and DeafBlind Awareness Week. We're also looking to focus on Deaf Black History during Black History Month. Resources available from CSP include hearing aid packets, How to Learn ASL packet, and Directory of Services 2020. CSP worked with the Department of Elections to have the voter pocket guide translated into ASL. In lieu of an Open House this year, CSP switched to a video project which included various partners and organizations to celebrate Deaf Awareness Week. The COVID-19 resource page on the VDDHH website has been very popular.

Technology Assistance Program (TAP): Christine Ruderson, Technology Assistance Program Manager. TAP has been hit hard by the pandemic, with 106 appointments with consumers cancelled. The Deaf/Hard of Hearing Regional Specialists have been troopers throughout, and the TAP contracts were suspended between April 7 and August 3. TAP has received new TAP applications and renewals. A major concern is providing services while ensuring the welfare and safety of the specialists. Overall, appointments were down 30%, exhibits down 17%, and presentations down 4%. Trainings have been at the zero level, mostly due to consumer unfamiliarity with the mechanics of Zoom. TAP has used the suspension time to work on training packets for the specialists, organizing equipment and preparing records for destruction/retention, following policies set by the Library of Virginia.

### **III. BOARD REPORTS**

Dr. Lewis highlighted a few activities from March through October. She represented the Advisory Board on the Department of Health Equity workgroup. On June 2 Dr. Lewis was invited to a virtual community meeting on the Americans with Disabilities Act and COVID-19, hosted by the U.S. Department of Justice, in which she shared information about her advocacy efforts for the deaf/hard of hearing during the pandemic. Dr. Lewis also created a survey about the state's response to COVID-19 which led to phone, emails, and a public webinar on June 16<sup>th</sup> regarding effective communication during the pandemic. She moderated a webinar entitled, "Gearing Up to Vote: What Deaf and Hard of Hearing Virginians Need to Know," on September 26. Dr. Lewis partnered with the Department of Health to develop a webinar that addressed the COVID-wise app and effective communication. Dr. Lewis emphasized the importance of outreach efforts that communicate directly with deaf and hard of hearing individuals of all cultures, races and backgrounds.

Carrie Humphrey shared that interpreter training programs continue across the state. The in-person conference that the Virginia Registry of Interpreters planned to host in July transitioned to an online format that will take place over a course of six months. This endeavor is going well and the numbers are great. The six-hour workshop geared for deaf interpreters on ethics in decision-making was very popular and a waiting list was created. The workshop will be re-offered on December 5 at no-cost to participants.

### **IV. COMMONWEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF, DEAFBLIND AND HARD OF HEARING**

Karen Brimm, Community Services Program Manager, provided a report on her duties as the acting Access and Functional Needs Officer (AFNO) with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), a command level position with the Unified Command. Under the umbrella of access and functional needs are people with disabilities, adults over age 65, people with limited English proficiency, children, and people with limited access to resources. These populations are particularly vulnerable during states of emergency. There has been a huge amount of activity during the pandemic and Ms. Brimm has participated in over 320 meetings, conference calls and trainings connected to access and functional needs since March. She has been the liaison to the Unified Command to address the needs, concerns and issues of the communities. She has reached out to the Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion officer at the Governor's Office and briefed Pete Gaynor, the FEMA Administrator. She has worked on endeavors with various state agencies to create documents such as the Health Equity Guidebook for Testing and Tracing that uses a whole-community approach and addresses effective

communication and cultural access, and a checklist to assist health districts in providing accessible testing events. These strategies will be rolled into vaccination efforts as well. With the Access and Functional Needs Committee of VDEM, a document and training was created to help state agencies ensure that all materials that are public-facing and released is accessible to people with disabilities. They have collected resources that are available to state agencies about clear face masks, visors, the roadblocks that face coverings present to the deaf and hard of hearing community, and other reasonable modifications. The COVID-19 emergency has brought up the opportunity to make departments across the state recognize gaps in access and that all information, websites, graphs, apps, etc. need to be fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. Ms. Brimm is honored to be in this role and involved with the very important work to provide education about access and functional needs, and communication accessibility issues.

#### **V. DPOR STUDY FOLLOW-UP**

Director Raff followed up on the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulations (DPOR) report that was disseminated in November 2019. The report recommended a more robust registration system. The plan consisted of a workgroup to figure out the best approach and to improve interpreter services throughout the Commonwealth. The workgroup was put on hold due to the pandemic and until a new Interpreter Services Manager is hired. Director Raff asked the Advisory Board to consider appointing one or two members to represent the Board on this workgroup.

Ms. Hutcheson shared that the more robust registration system may be achieved without legislation by possibly using a process of regulatory amendment to improve the directory of sign language interpreters. She cautioned that the regulatory process includes a lot of public input and if the comments do not support the changes, then VDDHH could not go forward. The feedback from the public, however, would be valuable to VDDHH. The regulatory process would take about 18 months, the same general timeframe as introducing legislation to the General Assembly in 2022. Director Raff does not know at this stage if the changes will be addressed through legislation or regulations, but it will definitely be one of the options.

#### **VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chairperson Branch called for public comment, and no comments were received via the YouTube channel.

#### **VII. NEW BUSINESS AND FUTURE MEETING AGENDA**

There was no new business. Members were asked to consider topics for discussion at future board meetings

Future meetings will occur quarterly on the first Wednesday of the month and are slated for February 3, May 5, August 4 and November 3 of 2021. Meetings could be virtual or in-person. Calendar invites will be sent to board members and participating staff.

#### **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion was made by M. Humphrey, seconded by Ms. Wilbur, to adjourn the meeting at 11:40 a.m.