Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2020

Members Present:
Traci D. Branch
Carrie N. H. Humphrey, NIC
Shantell D. Lewis, Au.D.
Roy B. Martin, IV
Kathi A. Mestayer
Timothy R. Patterson
Colin H. Wells
Susanne B. Wilbur, LCSW

Members Absent:
Jason M. Zuccari

Staff Present:
Eric H. 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

ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:
Catherine Clough
Elizabeth Leitch
Laurie B. Malheiros
Bernice McCormack
Rhonda D. Tuck, Cavalier Reporting

1. COFFEE AND REFRESHMENTS - NETWORKING
2. On Wednesday, February 5, 2020 at 9:30 a.m., the members of the Advisory Board of the
3. Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) convened in the conference
4. room at VDDHH Central Office, 1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 201, Henrico, VA 23229-5012.
5.
6. II. CALL TO ORDER
7. At 10:00 a.m., Chairperson Traci D. Branch called the meeting to order. A quorum was
8. established with more than five members present. Catie Finley, Assistant Secretary of Health and
9. Human Resources, was welcomed and made an introduction. All members, staff and visitors
were welcomed and introduced themselves. The communication rules for the meeting were reviewed.

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

The Board reviewed the meeting minutes from November 6, 2019. The motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Mr. Wells, seconded by Dr. Lewis, and unanimously passed.

III. PROGRAM REPORTS

Executive and Virginia Relay: Director Raff reported on the Virginia Relay. The Relay Manager position was recently posted and includes a national recruitment. The position will be posted until it is filled and recruitment does not have a deadline. Director Raff shared information gleaned from attending two conferences last fall about emerging relay technology such as Text to 911 and Real-Time Text. An issue before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the transfer of responsibility to the states to screen people for eligibility for captioned phone services and if the states will be reimbursed. There is no decision yet from the FCC.

The next Virginia Relay Advisory Council meeting will be held on April 16 at Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) Central Office and the board members are welcome to attend.

The last town hall meeting of the Statewide Interagency Team will take place on March 21 in Staunton. All comments from the town hall meetings are collected and coded according to categories of needs. The Team will be prioritizing needs, based on stakeholder feedback, and writing a needs assessment report, which will help shape future services. The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities has hired a new Executive Director, Teri Morgan.

Director Raff covered other program initiatives within the agency including Support Service Provider (SSP) for deafblind individuals, and working with the Center for the Assessment of Sign Language Interpretation (CASLI) about the feasibility of becoming a test site for its national interpreting certification test. He also noted that there are tickets available for a semi-pro baseball game in Richmond on May 31 for board members and their families. The host is Friendship Circle of Virginia and the event will promote disability awareness and inclusion.

Director Raff shared anecdotal stories he received about various issues faced by deaf/hard of hearing people across the state, which reminds us of why we are here to serve.

Interpreter Services Program (ISP): Leslie Hutcheson, Interpreter Services Manager, shared that the new services agreement for sign language interpreters has been issued and ISP has received about 30 signed agreements. A single document was developed to include both the agreement and a manual for widespread use. A barrier to this process is the length of time required for people to obtain SWaM or microbusiness certifications. Ms. Hutcheson will compile a list of people who are waiting and approach the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity. The agreement does not expire and will be reviewed annually. The agreement and list of verified, qualified sign language interpreters (VQSLI) will be posted on the VDDHH website.
Ms. Hutcheson reported that ISP has also been working on database enhancements and addressing some issues found during an IT security audit. Lastly, Ms. Hutcheson announced her retirement, effective August 31.

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program has been working with CASLI about becoming a test administrator and the technical/computer requirements to meet the standards. VQAS is working on a plan for new materials, disseminating the materials, and deaf rater training for the current grant year. It will be laying out a timeline for that in order to be accomplished before August 31.

Community Services: Karen Brimm, Community Services Manager, reported that Community Services has been working with the Technical Assistance Program (TAP) on the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Specialist contracts and RFP process, and has focused on the forms and monthly reporting so that the data better reflect the needs of the community.

SSP Pilot Program– VDDHH submitted a grant proposal to the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities amounting to $300,000 (including in-kind contributions from other partners). That proposal was endorsed by the Virginia Board, however, the federal funds are currently not available. The Virginia Board will meet again in March and VDDHH will then have a better idea of the status and if the proposal needs to be altered in any way.

I-CAN Accessibility project – Community Services is working with the project to develop a needs assessment in American Sign Language (ASL), which is currently being vetted by the Institutional Review Board.

Virginia Department for Emergency Management (VDEM) – Dawn Brantley, Strategic Branch Coordinator and advocate of accessibility in VDEM activities, has left the agency to work in Massachusetts.

Joint Committee on Healthcare- The Committee wrapped up on the LEAD-K bill from last year’s General Assembly and the Committee did not take action. VDDHH was involved as part of the stakeholder group.

Training to law enforcement and corrections continues in sensitivity, communication awareness, and assistive technology. Community Services continues outreach activities, including being a part of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts disabilities job fair.

The reporting of Information and Referral requests is being updated to ensure that data on most pressing issues is available. Among the issues noted by Community Services are employment concerns brought up by job coaches about some employers’ reluctance to hire a deaf/hard of hearing person, and deaf/hard of hearing seniors placed in facilities without adequate communication. Ms Brimm also noted that the Richmond area Alcoholics Anonymous is now self-funding interpreter services for weekly meetings. Ms. Brimm provided preliminary data collected on the nature of incoming calls received by the agency’s front desk.

The Board recessed from 11:00 to 11:10 a.m.
Technology Assistance Program (TAP): Ms. Ruderson, Technology Assistance Program Manager, reviewed the program activities report and second quarter report.

TAP staff attended the Virginia State Libraries conference with a goal of matching libraries with VDDHH services. A pilot display on deaf awareness at the Fairfield Library (Henrico) has resulted in several invites for TAP tables.

A focus group was held for Speech Language Pathologists in partnership with TAP and Griffin/Altos, a manufacturer and distributor of electro-larynxes. TAP has provided outreach to the Virginia chapters of the Lost Cords support group.

Request for Proposal (RFP) process – TAP has developed new forms, reporting systems, training manual, presentation scripts and thumb drives which were needed for the recent training provided to the Deaf/HH Specialists. The TAP training manual included instructions on how to use the enhanced database. Cybersecurity training was required of (and completed by) the Deaf/HH Specialists.

As a side project, TAP has been working with Larry Hubert to look into the benefits, pros and cons of using the GalaPro app in theaters that will show captions on smartphones. Mr. Hubert is actively involved with the Hearing Loss Association of America, Greater Richmond chapter.

TAP is implementing a plan to hold Zoom meetings each month to have better, more organized information and communication between the Deaf/HH Specialists on a frequent and timely basis. Two facility contractors are no longer TAP sites with the new contract changes, but services will be continuing in those regions.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Katherine Malady requested that VDDHH look into a pathway for deaf interpreters, similar to the VQAS, to validate their skills prior to national certification, and provided written documentation.

Patty Harris commented on the American Sign Language Club at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and the university is not providing interpreters on an ongoing basis for the club’s meetings and presentations. Ms. Harris spoke about a deaf individual who does not have communication access within the Catholic church. The church’s understanding is that the Americans with Disabilities Act does not cover churches and is an exempt organization, and she asked for VDDHH’s advice on the issue.

Director Raff shared written comments submitted by Jennifer Witteborg.

V. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Leslie Hutcheson gave the report. This year in the General Assembly is a long session. VDDHH does not have authority to take position on bills, and only offers comments upon request, or if it is the lead agency on a bill. If it is a lead agency, then it will represent the administration on the bill and be at all legislative meetings. VDDHH is the lead agency on two bills involving open captioning in theaters. National Association of Theater Owners (NATO) commissioned a study.
of the impact on operating costs, with the report due in the spring, and the bills have been carried
over until next session.

LEAD-K – SB 564 was introduced that would put the responsibility of a language acquisition
measurement program under the Early Hearing and Detection Intervention (EDHI) program. It
was amended to remove the Department of Education and sent to Appropriations and Finance
Committee due to fiscal impact. VDDHH is not the lead agency on the bill.

Other bills of interest to VDDHH - The bill on mandated health insurance coverage for hearing
aids for minors has been continued. There is also a bill related to the relocation of call centers to
foreign countries and the notification requirements of such. It is unclear if this bill could have a
potential impact on the Virginia Relay Center. The bill addresses state business activities while
the Relay was established for people to conduct their private phone conversations, which may
include state business activity. There would clearly be fiscal impact of centers having to set up in
Virginia.

Communication access in the General Assembly – VDDHH met with deaf consumers, the Senate
Clerk’s Office and the House Clerk’s office to discuss communication access. The consumers
clearly presented the problems of using iPads with video remote interpreting (VRI) to meet with
General Assembly members. There is a lack of strict credentialing of VRI interpreters. VDDHH
will continue to work with the General Assembly to resolve the issue of communication access.

Chairperson Branch announced that a public comment was received by email from Jennifer
Witteborg and was included in board packets.

The Board recessed and the meeting resumed at 12:35 p.m.

VI. BOARD REPORTS

Ms. Humphrey reported that the VRID-hosted Region II Conference planning is progressing
well. The conference, slated for July 16 -19, will include training requirements for deaf
individuals in preparation for the national interpreting test. For more information about the
training and sponsorships, the website address is
www.vrid.org.

Reynolds Community College – The pathway to a bachelor’s degree with VCU was approved
and students can now register for that. This includes a pathway for Associate of Applied Science
(AAS) degree students, which is a new and exciting opportunity.

Roy Martin shared that the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Chapter in Norfolk
has been reinvigorated. Director Raff stated that he is available to present to the group. The local
parents group is joining with Sertoma camp to provide a four-day summer camp in 2020 for
dead/hard of hearing children at no cost. Mr. Martin referred Safe House Project, which had a
case of a deaf girl who was sex trafficked, and thanked Director Raff for recently providing
resources to that organization.

Ms. Mestayer noted that Director Raff will present on March 14 at the Greater Richmond
Chapter of HLAA. She has filed a formal complaint with the Department of Justice regarding
William and Mary and the lack of captioning at its film festival.
Ms. Wilbur is involved with Shelter for Help in Emergency (SHE) in Charlottesville, which is “deaf friendly.” The organization recently received a grant award and is interviewing for a project manager.

Director Raff will attend the Unconference at the University of Virginia which will bring together various offices for students with disabilities to address higher education and accessibility.

Tim Patterson reported that families who are transitioning their deaf/hard of hearing children from early intervention to the IEP, but are struggling to qualify for an IEP and continue services. Ideas and input was shared by the board members. The chairperson encouraged members follow up with Mr. Patterson by email.

**VII. STRATEGIC PLANNING ACTIVITY**

Ms. Hutcheson explained the strategic planning process and engaged the board in a discussion focusing on ISP and VQAS.

Who are the stakeholders? The members identified state agencies, deaf consumers, interpreters, families of deaf consumers, businesses, public education system, healthcare, law enforcement, public-at-large, schools outside of the classroom, local governments, deaf staff of VDDHH, nursing homes, General Assembly, Community Services Boards, courts, and non-profits.

How well is VDDHH serving the stakeholders? Ms. Hutcheson explained that in Interpreter Services, the metric has a target of 96% of coordination requests filled, but the program exceeds that and the rate is 97% to 98% filled. Discussion ensued about the filled request metric versus a referral to resources. A question was asked in regard to consumer satisfaction survey. A member commented that VDDHH needs to take into consideration what the requestor is looking for, e.g. getting a request filled, being satisfied with the qualifications of the interpreter, and requesting/obtaining the services of a deaf interpreter. The agency could break up interpreters as stakeholders into distinct groups as their experiences are different, e.g., interpreters new to the field may not be getting work and experience, or fully understand how the coordinating process works.

ISP receives about 150 to 200 requests a month, with court as the top customer. VDDHH works with the Supreme Court of Virginia, and ISP can use private agencies and VRI to fill court requests, as needed.

How can the program improve? The recommendations of the board were to track data, provide a pathway for following up, and gather feedback from the interpreters. Questions raised were replicating data collection from the private interpreting agencies, and the agency’s social media presence. Other stakeholders for VQAS include the Virginia Department of Education, raters, school systems and training programs. Discussion ensued about VQAS diagnostics and if stagnant interpreters are being served by testing every three years, but their skill level may not up to the point of taking the national test.
Do ISP and VQAS programs support the mission of VDDHH? Members agreed that the programs support the mission.

What are the values of ISP and VQAS? The board identified these values in ISP and VQAS programs:

- Transparency in how the programs function
- Clear and effective communication
- Meeting diversity needs
- Meeting the needs of individuals
- Accountability

Are the two programs living up to these values? The board recognizes that the staff strive to meet these values, but the members were not sure if the general public is aware of the work that goes into the programs and services. Specific areas mentioned were the courts, law enforcement, and emergency personnel. VDDHH staff has worked steadily on increasing awareness of the programs over a long period of time, but barriers and limitations remain.

New Possibilities – What could ISP and VQAS do if they could not fail?

- Website and educating stakeholders on how to use the information there
- Real-time chat for users to ask questions and obtain answers quickly
- Artificial intelligence, video-on demand/holographic interpreters
- “Grow your own program” for both hearing interpreters new to the field and deaf interpreters
- Recognize the BEI as a credential in Virginia
- Update the written test to reflect current code of ethics
- Addressing the VQAS diagnostic
- Evaluate customer satisfaction through a town hall approach
- Create more diversity in the resources and services to include foreign language fluency
- Add another staff person to ISP
- Provide interpreters for AA meetings and funerals (reinstate)
- Implement a scheduling management system

The Board recessed and the meeting resumed at 2:15 p.m.

What are the things that the programs need to stop doing?
Stop using an inefficient, manual data entry of requests process and use online forms.

Looking back from February 2023 to now, what has happened to make us feel satisfied with the progress? What would the board members like to see in three years coming out of this meeting?

- Having a vibrant supply of professionals who are helping each other and networking
- Getting feedback and ways to improve from existing projects and efforts
- Supporting the development of more deaf interpreters in Virginia
- See what can be done with the results of the Department of Professional and Occupational (DPOR) report
- Ethical accountability for VQAS interpreters
• Licensure for interpreters in Virginia
• Database to collect information about the performance of interpreting programs

Ms. Hutcheson explained that the board will go through the same process at the next meeting, focusing on Community Services and TAP.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS AND FUTURE MEETING AGENDA

There was no new business.

Director Raff touched on two points for further consideration regarding the licensure of interpreters. DPOR recognized that adverse harm could happen to deaf individuals specifically in medical, legal and financial situations. The report included two recommendations: 1) robust registration (that is open to interpretation); and 2) VDDHH to administer a certification program. This could be considered a window of opportunity, to ride on this report and make suggestions to the legislature. Doing so would require input from the Advisory Board, stakeholders, deaf consumers, staff and interpreters, which could be a long process but VDDHH is willing to pursue.

Chairperson Branch announced that Ms. Mestayer will be rotating off the Advisory Board because she has served two consecutive terms. Her last board meeting will be in May, and she was thanked for her service to VDDHH.

Mr. Patterson’s and Ms. Wilbur’s first terms are expiring as of June 30 and they were asked if they wish to continue through reappointment.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, a motion was made by Mr. Martin, seconded by Mr. Wells, to adjourn the meeting at 2:45 p.m.