

Approved  
8/28/24



**Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**  
**1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 201**  
**Henrico, VA 23229-5012**

**Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**  
**May 1, 2024**

**Members Present:**

Carl Cline, Jr., Vice Chairperson  
Traci Branch  
Chris Gregory  
Kristin Karmon  
Andrew Nash  
Tim Patterson  
Susanne Wilbur  
Cathee Wolford

**Members Absent:**

Karen Engelhardt, Chairperson

**Staff Present:**

Eric Raff, Director  
Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager  
Karen Brimm, Interpreter Services Manager  
Paul Stuessy, Community Service Program Manager  
Felecia Smith, VA Relay Manager  
Brittany Howard, TAP Manager  
Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager

**ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:**

Lois Boyle, CART writer  
John Folker, Interpreter  
Elaine Hernandez, Interpreter

**Visitors:**

Interpreter Training Program students (7)  
Virginia Association of the Deaf (2)

On Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at 10:00 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. Carl Cline, Vice Chairperson, called the meeting to order. A quorum was present. Communication rules were reviewed by the Vice Chairperson and Director Raff. Introductions were made for

the members, staff, and visitors present. Mr. Cline reviewed the agenda, as well as announced that Governor Youngkin has recognized May 2024 as Speech, Language and Hearing Month.

Minutes from February 7, 2024, the meeting was reviewed, and a motion was made to approve with no changes (Wolford/Nash). Motion passed by consensus.

**PRESENTATION: EARLY HEARING DETECTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAM, DAPHNE MILLER AND DEEPALI SANGHANI, VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

Daphne Miller and Deepali Sanghani provided an overview of the Virginia EDHI systems of care, included key protocols, updates, and data. The Virginia EDHI program aims to identify and support children who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have congenital CMV (Cytomegalovirus). The program ensures all newborns are screened for hearing by one month of age, with those who fail receiving a diagnostic evaluation by three months and early intervention by six months. Virginia law mandates all hospitals to conduct these screenings and report results via the EDHI Information System. Since September 1, 2020, the program also requires CMV screening for infants who fail the initial hearing test, per administrative Code of Virginia. The mission is to provide families with resources and information to support their child's development.

Virginia pioneered hearing screening legislation in 1999, initially receiving only failure reports. In 2007, the state developed the Virginia Infant Screening Infant Tracking System (VISITS), a web-based platform for hospitals to enter all hearing screening results. This system, integrating data from vital records, allowed comprehensive tracking of all children's follow-up statuses. By 2010, audiologists could also enter results directly into VISITS, enhancing the system's ability to monitor and ensure proper follow-ups for all screened children.

Virginia has improved its newborn hearing screening process by implementing VISITS, allowing hospitals and audiologists to directly enter results. In 2019, the state quickly adapted to include targeted CMV screening, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Legislation was passed in February 2019, followed by the formation of a workgroup to develop protocols. By mid-2020, system enhancements were completed to support CMV data collection and dissemination, streamlining both hearing and CMV screening processes. Between April and July 2020, Virginia educated stakeholders on the updated CMV screening process and the use of the VISITS. This included system training and general CMV information. By September 2020, the CMV screening program was fully implemented in all hospitals statewide.

The presentation included an overview of program successes, with Virginia having a consistent hearing screening rate of 97 to 99 percent of all babies born in the state. Other strategies include iPad distribution to families to help them gain access to language resources, sharing parent resources, working with support organizations and providing follow-along services.

**PROGRAM REPORTS**

**Executive – Eric Raff, Director - Director Raff**

The EDHI conference will be held from May 15-17 in Richmond, with free registration. It will feature workshops on newborn hearing screenings and early intervention, geared to both professionals and families. Governor Youngkin issued a certificate of recognition for Speech, Language, and Hearing Month (May). VDDHH tries to obtain the Governor's Proclamation on three events every year: Deaf Awareness, Deaf-Blind Awareness and Speech, Language and Hearing.

Director Raff discussed the legislative session, which recently ended. HB125, concerning commitment hearings and orders, was passed, and signed by the governor. He explained that ASL interpreters are currently paid at a flat rate for these assignments, which was \$75 a day. VDDHH proposed the change that would parallel the spoken language interpreters who are paid by the hour. The bill passed and is not exactly what VDDHH wanted,

but the flat rate was kept and increased to \$120 per day, effective in July, which is a challenge due to the amount of time for the assignment, travel and paperwork.

Ms. Wilbur and Mr. Patterson's have served their terms and will rotate off the board. Director Raff asked for the board's help in finding qualified candidates to fill the vacant seats (professionals in the field and parents of deaf children). He presented them with a certificate of appreciation in recognition of their valuable service.

Paul Stuessy has been promoted to Community Services Manager. The agency is recruiting for several positions, including Community Services Specialist, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialist for Richmond, and a Policy Analyst. There is also ongoing recruitment for the second cohort of Support Service Providers and deaf-blind participants for the July training. VDDHH provided training in February to a second cohort of eight Deaf Mentors and we are in the process of awarding contracts to them.

Director Raff reported on early intervention initiatives through the Department of Health, Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Education and Center for Family Involvement. They are working to develop language milestones and an informative "green booklet" for families, expected to be completed by summer. Health and Human Resources (HHR) has also started an initiative related to disability and language access led by VCU that will focus on all the HHR departments to address gaps in accessibility. The VDDHH "museum" has a recent addition of a old public video phone, given to the agency by the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center.

#### **BOARD REPORTS/WORKING LUNCH**

Mr. Cline shared that he is a board member for the Roanoke Valley Speech and Hearing Center and has been involved in fundraising over the past couple of months. The Center is facing issues with graffiti and homeless individuals camping at the back of the building, and it is working with the police and media to address these concerns. Despite repainting the back of the building, the graffiti reappears the next day and the Center is actively looking for solutions.

Mr. Gregory reported on the firearm safety and Virginia concealed carry classes for the deaf and hard of hearing that started about a year ago. SafeSide Tactical has been very supportive. Our first class had seven participants, the second had five, but the third was canceled due to low turnout. After promoting the program better, thanks to help from Deidra at the Roanoke Valley Speech and Hearing Center, the latest class had 20 attendees. SafeSide had been losing money on these classes but is now closer to breaking even and remains committed to the program.

Ms. Wilbur reported that although she has recently retired, she remains active with the domestic violence and sexual assault program, now collaborating with Virginia Alliance under a new two-year grant. She emphasized the importance of including deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the project and ensuring they remain central to the training, and keeping the project focused on the needs of the Deaf Community.

Dr. Nash reported that he obtained his Virginia license to practice. He was originally only licensed in Illinois so he could only practice on federal campus. This allows him to provide more services in Virginia.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Cynthia Burton and Tom Dowling of the Virginia Association of the Deaf provided public comment, encouraging VDDHH to establish a centralized statewide, web-based Calendar of Events. A copy of their email was included in the meeting packet.

#### **PROGRAM REPORTS (RESUMED)**

##### **Interpreter Services - Karen Brimm, Manager**

Ms. Karen Brimm provided a summary of the quarterly report for January through March. She discussed ongoing VDDHH support for a grant through Idaho State University entitled “Promoting Equity in Healthcare Interpreting.” Currently in the third year of the grant, the program is assisting a second cohort of participants who are being mentored by experienced medical interpreters. The hope is that the five participants will complete their activities by May, though completing grant activities can sometimes be challenging due to life circumstances.

In addition, Ms. Brimm has been active in emergency management, serving as a liaison to the Department of Emergency Management. Her role includes quarterly activities for various committees and delivering presentations on accessible communication during disasters or emergency events.

Ms. Brimm’s involvement in the Support Service Provider (SSP) pilot project include handling grant reporting to the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, refining recruitment forms and surveys, and ensuring the project is following through on its goals. Recruitment is progressing well with hopes to train a second cohort of SSPs and deaf-blind participants. Ms. Brimm and Director Raff are working on options to extend funding beyond December.

In regular program operations, Ms. Brimm and Director Raff took on the task of proposing a change to the Code of Virginia (HB125) and have a better understanding of what the process is. HB125 sought to increase compensation for specialized interpreting that combines legal and mental health aspects. Some challenges remain with outdated, manual paperwork required by the interpreters. She is advocating for the digitization of this process to ease the administrative burden on interpreters.

Ms. Brimm commended Danielle Bird, Interpreter Services Coordinator, for her exceptional effort in designing a set of six flyers that provide information about securing interpreters for various settings. These flyers feature QR codes linking to digital resources, which will make it easier to keep information up-to-date and accessible. Ms. Brimm also provided an update on the VQAS and EIPA testing programs, noting that a change in the EIPA's retesting policy from six months to one year might impact VQAS testing practices. As a result, VDDHH may consider changing its retesting schedule.

### **Virginia Relay – Felecia Smith, Manager**

Ms. Smith reported that Relay has been very busy during Quarter 3, hosting its first town hall meetings to address the transition from analog to digital services and its impact on TTY users. The initial meetings had about 22 people in attendance and aimed to break down the changes in Relay services. The next town hall, scheduled for June, will focus the process to help TAP consumers transition from analog caption phones to digital devices. Future topics for these quarterly meetings include 9-1-1 services, direct video calling, and the universal telecommunications access platform (uTAP), which aims to streamline Relay services by providing a single phone number for various Relay services. Implementing uTAP will involve significant changes and negotiations with the FCC. Currently, a feasibility study for uTAP involves Virginia, Maryland, California, and another state. Progress has been made, but challenges have arisen with accessing the necessary databases for Relay users. Efforts are ongoing to overcome these obstacles.

FCC meetings are addressing the analog-to-digital transition, with the National Association of State Relay Administrators (NASRA) urging the FCC to acknowledge the challenges in the analog to digital transition. The FCC's vague responses leave states uncertain about future state relay services. Discussions aim to develop practical strategies for managing the transition, what can be proposed and what is feasible.

In the third quarter, Ms. Smith presented at the Tenacious Telecommunicators (Triple T) conference in Abingdon to 9-1-1 dispatchers and attended as an exhibitor. She will attend the APCO/NENA conference in

two months, also within the 9-1-1 arena. While overall Relay traffic is decreasing, RCC requests increased by 5%, with efforts to boost awareness of RCC services.

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

Ms. Howard reported that the Region 7 Specialist position remains vacant, with ongoing recruitment efforts. Tablets are being prepared for demonstrations and training, each requiring a unique Apple ID, with IT assisting in setting up necessary email addresses. The first round of tablets will be reserved for TTY consumers, with specialist training deemed crucial for effective consumer assistance. Android tablet options are also being explored. The winding down of the Affordable Connectivity Program will affect the MOU with Empower 360, which provides tablets with internet services. A centralized TAP application process is being piloted, with applications screened by the Central Office before reaching the Regional Specialists. The online application is being tested and is expected to launch in July 2024. Current statistics show fewer than the targeted 7 TAP applicants being served per month, prompting efforts to update equipment options and improve contracts for the next year.

### **Community Services – Paul Stuessy, Manager**

Mr. Stuessy reported that CSP continues to work with the Regional Specialists to collect information and referrals. CSP has received 315 referrals with the top five interests being technology, hearing aids, information about their deaf community and housing solutions for individuals who are homeless. Inquiries have also included where to take ASL classes. He reviewed data related to outreach events such as exhibits/booths and presentations. Five training events were held, including a disability awareness event at the Jewish Community Center, staff training on Relay calls and available resources, an HLAA training on telehealth, and training for 22 state police cadets on interacting with deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. The Deaf Mentor program trained eight new mentors, with the Deaf Mentor Coordinator, Melissa, attending the national EHDI conference. The Support Service Providers (SSP) program received 55 service requests, most of which were fulfilled, and adjustments were made to accommodate deaf-blind individuals. Adam Drake, SSP Coordinator, is actively recruiting more SSPs, with a training session planned for July. The 2024 Directory of Services has been compiled and is available for distribution. Challenges such as form accessibility for deaf-blind individuals have been addressed by accepting requests through texting and video, and ongoing efforts are made to ensure efficient handling of requests. The Community Services team remains dedicated to providing comprehensive support and continuously improving processes to meet the community's needs.

### **PRESENTATION: TEXT TO 9-1-1 AND NEXT GENERATION 9-1-1 (NG 911), DOROTHY SPEARS-DEAN, DEPUTY STATE COORDINATOR, VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

Ms. Spears-Dean provided an update on the technology initiative, Next Generation 9-1-1 which includes Text to 9-1-1. The 9-1-1 Integrated Services Program transitioned from VITA to VDEM through state legislation in the 2020 General Assembly. The name was changed to the 9-1-1 and Geospatial Bureau. The state has been transitioning from analog to IP network for all Virginia 9-1-1 Centers to create a statewide IP network creating more flexibility and diversity.

Regarding the progress made in the Next Generation 9-1-1: 85 of 124 sites have been deployed. There are 39 cutovers left with a target date is October 31, 2024. The 9-1-1 Comprehensive Plan has four initiatives and intersects with the deaf and hard of hearing community in Virginia. Ms. Spears-Dean asked the members of the board about the future of NG911 and how to build capacity and capability. Feedback was offered and included:

Built in captions on 9-1-1 calls with Voice Carry Over

Can video phones plug into 9-1-1?

How to use text with 9-1-1; instructions are needed

What areas have the capability?

Maps are available about geospatial 9-1-1 but it is not user-friendly

How to “flag” a phone number to let 9-1-1 know that caller is deaf/hard of hearing

Resource: AccesSOS

Offer training to more 9-1-1 academies

Rich Troshak as a resource

Topic of 9-1-1 could be added to a Relay Townhall

Have a path moving forward

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

#### **TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT**

The travel forms were distributed and signed by the members requesting reimbursement. Processing time is two to three weeks.

#### **MEETING ADJOURNMENT**

Being that there was no further business before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 3:25 PM (Wolford/Karmon). Motion carried.