

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NEWS RELEASE

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KCDHH Celebrates 40th Anniversary During Nat. Deaf History Month

Frankfort, Ky. (March 16, 2022) — In April, as National Deaf History Month recognizes and celebrates accomplishments of people who are deaf and hard of hearing, the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH) celebrates its 40th anniversary this year through a look back at the history and successes of the organization.

“The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has a rich history and track record of advocacy and providing information and services to the Commonwealth’s deaf and hard of hearing community and to anyone whose life is affected by hearing loss,” said Virginia L. Moore, KCDHH Executive Director. “We didn’t achieve that success overnight and we are grateful for the four decades the state has helped us work toward our goals, both completed and ongoing.”

The commission was founded in 1982 by an act of the General Assembly as an advisory agency to the governor and legislature concerning policies and programs for deaf and hard of hearing Kentuckians. The commission has grown over the years from 11 members in 1982 to the 14 current members, each representing a broad cross-section of the deaf and hard of hearing community.

In 1992, the legislature changed the agency name from the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to the more appropriate Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In its 40 years, the commission has had four executive directors: William B. Rogers, Dr. Bobbie Beth Scoggins, Liz Hill and Moore.

Since its establishment, the commission has been instrumental in several efforts to level the playing field for the deaf and hard of hearing community. In 1987, the state’s first interpreter training program began at Eastern Kentucky University. In 1990, the commission lobbied successfully for the Public Service Commission to provide a communications relay service for the deaf and hard of hearing. The legislature passed a bill in 1992 that would require American Sign Language to be recognized and taught for foreign language credit in Kentucky’s public schools, colleges and universities. In 2017, KCDHH was instrumental in the passing of Senate Bill 189, which allows deaf and hard of hearing persons to indicate voluntarily their hearing status in the Kentucky vehicle registration system, allowing law enforcement officers to see the status during traffic stops. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, KCDHH interpreters provided an unprecedented level of communication access to press briefings, granted by the Governor, for the first time in 25 years.

The Telecommunications Access Program (TAP), the agency’s most popular program, began in 1995 and was the 24th such program nationwide. For the first time in Kentucky’s history, the

state offered free specialized equipment, like captioned telephones, to the state's deaf, hard of hearing, and speech impaired population. As wireless devices, such as smartphones and tablets, have become more a part of the technological landscape, the application of them as communication devices by the deaf and hard of hearing community became more apparent. In 2011, KCDHH entered a one-year wireless device distribution pilot program, the first of its kind in the nation. The program, vetted through an application process, distributed free wireless devices, with service plans, to deaf and hard of hearing.

KCDHH can put you in touch with appropriate resources and services to help minimize the negative impact hearing loss may have on your life. Books and videos on topics ranging from coping with a hearing loss to assistive devices, legal rights, and parenting a child with a hearing loss are available through the library. KCDHH also distributes, at no cost, specialized telephone equipment to any Kentucky resident who has a hearing loss or speech impairment that affects his ability to effectively communicate using a regular telephone. The agency also provides communication visor cards and fact sheets targeting hearing loss and prevention. as well as information, referral and advocacy services.

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