

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
165th Quarterly Commission Meeting
April 24, 2020
Zoom Meeting

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Jeannie Taylor, Ms. Nancy Perry, Ms. Gerry Gordon-Brown, Ms. Amy Hatzel, Ms. Dodie Karr, Ms. Michelle Niehaus, Ms. Edie Ryan, Mr. Eddie Runyon, Mr. Thomas Evans, Mr. George Tunstall IV, Ms. Melissa Kelly, Ms. Barbie Harris, and Ms. Joy Kiser

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ms. Susan Rieber

STAFF PRESENT: Ms. Virginia Moore and Ms. Elise Kitchen

COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS: Ms. Rachel Morgan, Ms. Audrey Ruiz-Lambert and Ms. Laura Kogut

VISITORS: None

Ms. Taylor, Chair, called the 165th Quarterly Commission Meeting to order, and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Ms. Gordon-Brown, Secretary, called the roll, confirming that there was a quorum. Ms. Taylor requested that Board members review the minutes from the 164th Commission Meeting. Mr. Tunstall requested expansion of an acronym for the sake of clarity, which was noted for correction.

MS. PERRY (Mr. Evans) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE 164TH QUARTERLY COMMISSION MEETING WITH THE CHANGE. THE MOTION PASSED.

Ms. Taylor requested that Commission members review the Executive Board minutes from the March meeting.

MS. GERRY GORDON-BROWN (Ms. Harris) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES AS WRITTEN. THE MOTION PASSED.

REPORTS

Executive Board:

Ms. Taylor reported that the primary focus of discussion during the Executive Board meeting was legislation and that there was a visitor in attendance, Mary Pat Regan, Deputy Secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC). Ms. Taylor indicated that while it was highly unusual to have a visitor at an Executive Board Meeting, her presence was appreciated and resulted in a positive outcome regarding some of the items discussed during the meeting.

Ms. Taylor announced the results of the Executive Director's evaluation, commenting that while participation from Commission members was good, staff participation was low, and she is continuing to research the best way to resolve the issue. She stated that Ms. Moore's results were very positive overall, and while members may request to see the results, it must be done in person to maintain confidentiality.

Agency:

Ms. Moore began her report by giving a brief summary of events surrounding her decision to interpret the Governor's daily press conferences. She also commented on the unexpected request by the Governor for her to teach the viewing audience a different sign each day. Ms. Moore expressed her appreciation for his quick and smooth transition to a more culturally acceptable method of doing that once he was informed that there was an issue. In addition, she provided background information regarding the decision to bring in two other licensed and certified staff members to share the interpreting responsibilities.

Ms. Moore informed the Board of the difficulties she has encountered associated with providing effective access to the COVID-19 updates for a diverse audience of deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind consumers. She explained that in order to mitigate those difficulties, she made the decision to post her COVID-19 update vlogs in both color and black and white to make it easier for consumers with low vision to see them as clearly as possible. Those videos are also captioned. In addition, she is permitting an individual who is in training to become a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) to record ASL vlogs of the written updates, which are then posted on the KCDHH website in an effort make the COVID-19 update information even more accessible. Ms. Moore expressed appreciation for the opportunity this exposure has provided to promote awareness of deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing issues, citing various examples of the positive impact of this exposure.

Ms. Moore reported that she met with Access Center (AC) personnel and Kentucky interpreting agencies as well as freelance interpreters via Zoom. The goal of the meeting was to share information regarding the transition to remote interpreting, work together to resolve current issues, and discuss the long-term impact of this transition. She indicated that the meeting was well attended and very productive. She stated that one of the concerns for the future is that when the COVID-19 pandemic is under control and in-person interpreting is a safe option, service providers will want to continue to use Video Remote Interpreting (VRI), citing this time period as evidence the VRI satisfies the law in all cases. This sparked an in-depth conversation among Board members regarding licensing for interpreters providing VRI services, CDIs and DIs, appropriate use of VRI, the use of a CDI or DI via remote interpreting platforms as well as in person, and how to better serve deaf-blind consumers during this crisis.

Ms. Moore informed the Board that she is continuing to work with EWDC Deputy Secretary, Josh Benton, regarding the ongoing issues with accessing the unemployment system. She clarified some of the issues, provided detailed explanations as to why their potential solutions haven't borne fruit, and assured the Board that they are continuing to work together to resolve the issues.

Ms. Moore provided an update regarding Spire Development's plans for the senior citizens housing complex designed to cater to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing seniors. She said they were originally scheduled to break ground this spring, however that has been postponed. She indicated that the exact timing of the groundbreaking remains uncertain as the COVID-19 pandemic and the government's response to it are continually evolving.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Finance:

Ms. Moore reported that expenses are on target for the General Fund. She added that the request for a one-time appropriation of funds from the Public Service Commission (PSC) to supplement the Restricted Fund is still pending approval. In the meantime the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) is sending letters to consumers who have not yet received their equipment to provide updated information regarding delayed shipments and backordered equipment. Ms. Moore indicated that as soon as the funds are made available, equipment will be ordered giving priority to first time applicants. She added that while the budget is on target for this upcoming quarter, the new fiscal year is likely to include budget cuts as the government works to fund unemployment benefits and other emergency measures related to COVID-19.

THE FINANCE REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition Study Group:

Ms. Hatzel reported that the study group was working with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to figure out the best way to ensure that all students entering Kindergarten receive a hearing screening. She indicated that Healthy At Home procedures and other emergency response measures have temporarily impeded progress, but they will continue to work toward that goal.

Ms. Hatzel said the Common Grounds group met to share updates and look at the language of the advisory panel establishment to begin considering potential candidates to fill the roles described in the document modeled after Kansas' effort. She explained that the group was scheduled to meet on March 16 to establish a timeline, but the meeting was canceled when the COVID-19 restrictions went into effect. Ms. Hatzel inquired about the funds promised by the Lt. Governor's office to establish the Language Acquisition Advisory Council, and Ms. Moore replied that the money has not materialized yet. She indicated that she is concerned that the money could potentially be re-allocated to cover spending needs related to the Coronavirus, but she would let the Lt. Governor know that the Board has inquired as to when those funds might be available.

Ms. Karr inquired about how Kentucky is working to overcome obstacles regarding language acquisition and access to education for deaf students in the elementary schools during this time when everything is done through video platforms, email, and other electronic means rather than in person. Ms. Hatzel stated that there are educational groups for teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing on Facebook and other social media to help come up with creative ways to serve their students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). She said they are meeting with students through Zoom, FaceTime and whatever methods they can. Ms. Hatzel acknowledged that there are many roadblocks, including lack of internet service for some students, parents who don't sign, parents that just aren't willing to work with their kids on their schoolwork, or all of the above. She said that there are a lot of different solutions being discussed, but the bottom line is that the schools are aware that many of their students will be behind in the fall, and they know they will need to make adjustments to compensate for that.

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE ACCESS AND ACQUISITION STUDY GROUP REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Services for Seniors Study Group:

Ms. Niehaus reported that the nursing homes have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, so the work the Commission is doing with seniors is even more important. She said the silver lining is that nursing homes have been more open to using technology to connect people and combat isolation, so she is hopeful that the trend will continue after the pandemic is over.

Ms. Niehaus stated that she has been working to get the notes and cards that were received as a result of their partnership with Hands & Voices delivered to deaf and hard of hearing seniors in nursing homes. She said she was able to get a list of all the individuals who are under state guardianship as well as the names of the facilities where they reside, which inadvertently provided a list of the facilities that have the highest population of deaf and hard of hearing people. She indicated that as a result, there is an opportunity to reach out and provide information and resources to those facilities, such as how to get an interpreter or captioner.

Ms. Niehaus reminded the Board that the study group is ending June 30 and encouraged members to reach out to offer encouragement and lift the spirits of seniors to help reduce the sense of fear and isolation so many are experiencing. Ms. Karr indicated that she had been contacted by several people in nursing homes who were having trouble using their videophones due to poor Wi-Fi service, and since they are also using Video Relay Services (VRS) for interpreting purposes, they are having a lot of issues with access.

THE SERVICES FOR SENIORS STUDY GROUP REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

BOARD OPEN FORUM

Ms. Taylor announced that, due to time constraints, there would be no Open Forum.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Ms. Taylor reminded the Board that there are three Board members whose terms will expire June 30, 2020: Mr. Runyon, representing the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP); Ms. Harris, representing the Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD), and Mr. Tunstall as the Parent Representative. She also mentioned that Ms. Becky Cabe was replaced by Ms. Susan Rieber as designee for the Secretary of the EWDC when the new administration took office. Ms. Taylor stated that her service as a member of the Board was appreciated, and she would be given the opportunity to complete an Exit Interview to provide feedback regarding her experience with the Commission. She pointed out that there may be some changes in the Commission application process once the new administration publishes its directives, but not until after the current applications are processed. Ms. Moore reiterated that the KAD and AARP application packets were received and acknowledged by the Governor's office, but there is no indication as to when those selections will be made.

Ms. Taylor directed the attention of the Board to the two study group proposals and asked Ms. Hatzel to speak briefly about her Language Acquisition (K-12) study group proposal. Ms. Taylor then spoke briefly about the Kentucky Deaf-Blind Community study group proposal. Following supportive comments from Ms. Perry and Ms. Gordon-Brown, Ms. Taylor called for a vote to accept the study group proposals.

MR. EVANS (Mr. Runyon) MOVED TO CONTINUE THE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (K-12) STUDY GROUP. THE MOTION PASSED

MS. GORDON-BROWN (Ms. Harris) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL FOR THE KENTUCKY DEAF-BLIND COMMUNITY STUDY GROUP. THE MOTION PASSED.

NEW BUSINESS

Before conducting the vote for Parent Representative, Ms. Taylor gave the incumbent, Mr. Tunstall, the opportunity to give a brief statement and asked Ms. Niehaus to provide some additional supporting information about the other candidate, Ms. Montgomery. Ms. Taylor then called for a vote and announced that it would be done using the private chat feature. When the vote was discovered to be a tie, there was some discussion among the Board members as to the proper way to break the tie based on the KCDHH Bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order.

MR. RUNYON (Ms. Hatzel) MOVED TO ALLOW THE CHAIR TIME TO RESEARCH THE APPROPRIATE METHOD OF BREAKING THE TIE AND REPORT BACK TO THE BOARD. THE MOTION PASSED.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The next Executive Board meeting will be held on Friday, June 5, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m., location TBD
- The 166th Quarterly Commission Meeting will be held on Friday, July 17th, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., location TBD

MS. HARRIS (Ms. Gordon-Brown) MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION PASSED and the meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.