

**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
166th Quarterly Commission Meeting
July 17, 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, Ms. Melissa Kelly, and Ms. Barbie Harris
- MEMBERS ABSENT:** Ms. Susan Rieber, Mr. George Tunstall IV and Ms. Joy Kiser
- STAFF PRESENT:** Ms. Virginia Moore and Ms. Row Holloway
- COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS:** Ms. Rita Zirnheld-Anderson, Ms. Audrey Ruiz-Lambert and Ms. Laura Kogut
- VISITORS:** None

Ms. Taylor, Chair, called the 166th Quarterly Commission Meeting to order, and welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting. Ms. Gordon-Brown, Secretary, called roll, confirming that there was a quorum. Ms. Taylor requested that Board members review the minutes from the 165th Commission Meeting. There were no comments.

MS. PERRY (Ms. Gordon-Brown) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE 165TH QUARTERLY COMMISSION MEETING. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Taylor requested that members review the minutes from the special called meeting (for election of members) held in June. There were no comments.

MS. GORDON-BROWN (Mr. Runyon) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL CALLED MEETING AS WRITTEN. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Taylor requested that members review the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held in June. There were no comments.

MS. HARRIS (Ms. Perry) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES AS WRITTEN. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

REPORTS

Executive Board:

Ms. Taylor gave a brief synopsis of the Executive Board meeting and stated that Ms. Moore is still heavily involved in the Governor's daily press releases on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic response. KCDHH staff continues to respond to requests for

assistance and have had great results in working from home on all issues pertaining to the current needs of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind consumers.

Study groups were confirmed at this meeting, and beginning July 1st, we will again focus on Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition (Ms. Hatzel, Chair) in addition to a new group that will focus on the needs of Deaf-Blind consumers (Ms. Taylor chair). The Services for Seniors study group (Ms. Niehaus chair), which has been very successful and extremely beneficial in identifying the needs of seniors during the current COVID-19 pandemic, has come to an end as of June 30th.

Ms. Moore continues to work with the Lt. Governor and Cabinet Secretary on obtaining funds to support a statewide task force for the Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition study group. COVID-19 has put a damper on the momentum of this goal, but it should still be possible at some point.

Ms. Moore also reported that she has been in contact with the Governor's office regarding reappointments for Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD) and American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) positions on the board. Neither has been confirmed, but the office is aware of the need to process the applications. Current members (Ms. Harris and Mr. Runyon) will continue to serve until appointments are confirmed.

Ms. Taylor indicated she has had some concerns about our Strategic Plan and how we will be able to meet the goals during this new way of working. Ms. Moore confirmed that staff is continuing to meet the goals and establish partnerships that will help us fulfill the goals as outlined; although we have had to be creative in how we accomplish that.

Agency:

Ms. Moore stated that COVID-19 has been at the forefront of the last three months of work at KCDHH. Interpreters have been at all the Governor's press conferences and many interviews have been conducted. As a "golden nugget" of COVID-19, there has been a surge in recognition of the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing community and communication in general. We have seized this opportunity and have constructed numerous vlogs on pertinent issues, such as mental health, mask mandates, communication, social distancing, health concerns and unemployment. A grant has been filed with the Kentucky Colonels for \$10,000, and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds in the amount of \$175,000 have been requested from the state to purchase clear masks so communication can be successful in school, medical, mental health and business environments where regular masks prevent full communication. Partnerships have been established with Kentucky Hands & Voices and Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) to ensure clear masks are available and all children have equal access when they return to school.

Ms. Ryan asked about the Executive Order the Governor issued mandating masks but exempting deaf and hard of hearing from the required use. Ms. Moore stated she has addressed that with the Governor's Office, and they indicated they only added that exemption in an effort to allow for clear communication for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. It was not intended to be an overall exemption, and a vlog will be developed to explain its true intent. Masks should be worn by everyone and only removed for a short

time in conjunction with maintaining social distancing while communicating with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing. Members discussed this in depth, gave examples of how miscommunication is affecting participation in the mask mandate and expressed their concerns regarding their local school systems. Ms. Moore advised that KCDHH continues to attempt to resolve this misconception and ensure that community members are protected and participate safely in daily activities using masks as required. Once the bulk of masks are purchased, KCDHH will work with our partners to ensure that they are distributed appropriately. Ms. Taylor asked that members email Ms. Moore with their concerns to ensure they are addressed appropriately and timely.

Ms. Moore addressed contact tracing and how critical it is for the deaf and hard of hearing community to participate if contacted. She has worked with the Governor's Office to ensure that those workers are aware of the needs of our community and the preference to contact deaf individuals through video relay when making phone calls. Members discussed their concerns and community reactions, and Ms. Moore ensured the Board that she would relay them to the group in public health that is focusing on contact tracing. They are seeking workers to make the calls, and Ms. Moore and Ms. Niehaus stated that names of community members who could act as social contact tracers have been provided to ensure the community is comfortable with those who contact them. Ms. Moore commended Ms. Niehaus regarding her leadership with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) on this effort.

Ms. Moore advised that the KCDHH office is being cleaned every other Saturday by a state contracted janitorial service to ensure it meets safety standards during COVID-19. As a result, National Interpreter Certification (NIC) testing dates have been set on Fridays. NIC applicants are required to wear masks and enter only through the basement, and everything is disinfected when they leave. Additional staff members have now begun to work in the office one or two days a week on rotating schedules to accommodate public requests and assist consumers via telephone, videophone and through emails.

Regarding personnel updates, Ms. Moore informed members that Ms. Elise Kitchen has been hired as the Policy Specialist, and Ms. Jessica Endler-Smith has assumed the Program Coordinator position for the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP). A new Executive Secretary will be hired in the near future to answer phones and assume Ms. Kitchen's other duties. Ms. Endler's previous position, Administrative Specialist II, will be advertised soon, and we are hopeful to be fully staffed by this fall. Members were asked to send in recommendations to fill these positions if they know any motivated individuals that would work well with KCDHH. Ms. Moore briefed members on the new database that is to be implemented soon and the challenges we have faced in getting it up and running. It is robust and will cut down on phone calls and data entry and should be more efficient once staff is acclimated to the new process. She also updated members on the prison system lawsuit, requiring accessible communication for inmates, and how we acquired a six month extension on its completion to resolve some minor issues identified in full implementation. Ms. Moore advised that she has been working with the Governor's Office to resolve unemployment insurance (UI) issues as well stating that it has been a hot topic that has dominated the requests coming into KCDHH during this last quarter. There has been a lot of frustration, but additional staff has been hired by the UI office to speed up

the process, and the Governor is fully aware of the immediate need to address this issue. If members are aware of anyone struggling to receive benefits from UI they should forward contact information to KCDHH to assist in resolving their issues.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Finance:

Ms. Moore updated members on the agency's financial report, current status of TAP applications and how we were able to access funds from the new fiscal year to meet the demands for orders of equipment. This allowed us to fulfil the waiting list that had accumulated through June 30th. Beginning July 1st, orders will be limited to new applicants, placing reapplicants on a waiting list. In order to spread out the funds, a limited amount of equipment will be ordered each month. Reapplications will be held until all new applicants are served, and then equipment for reapplicants will be ordered if funds are available. KCDHH's general funds had a one-time cut of \$9,700 for this fiscal year, which was less than anticipated. Projected cuts for the next fiscal year may be 17% of the total budget or greater, which will truly be a challenge to deal with and maintain current services. We have been creative in the past and will continue to be creative to ensure we meet previous standards for service for our community. The state is hoping to receive federal funds to support state budgets through the federal CARES Act. If the federal government does not pass legislation to support state budgets, the cuts could be even greater. Ms. Moore encouraged members to contact their legislators and advocate for passage of emergency funds to support state programs.

THE FINANCE REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ

Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition:

Ms. Hatzel reported that the study group has not met since the pandemic started and has been concerned that funding previously promised to establish the Language Acquisition Advisory Council might not appear. However, Ms. Moore believes that there is a good chance that funds, although delayed, will still be allocated. Ms. Hatzel continues to work on an outline for Kentucky that mirrors Kansas' program in hopes we will be able to proceed.

Services for Seniors:

Ms. Niehaus reported that this is the final report for this group, and it has been a great learning experience and very beneficial in identifying the needs of our deaf and hard of hearing seniors. The group has established ties with nursing homes and community leaders that will serve us well in the future and have already assisted during COVID-19 in ensuring better communication and overall awareness of the community's needs. The resource guide developed by this group has been distributed, and several vlogs have been developed that have served to educate both community members and the professionals that serve them. Work with the Ombudsman's office will continue, and the Friendly Visitors program should be able to continue to serve deaf and hard of hearing seniors throughout Kentucky.

Ms. Gordon-Brown asked for an update on the Northern Kentucky senior center plans, and Ms. Moore indicated she had not heard from them since the pandemic began, but she would contact them again to see what progress has been made and get a status report for the next meeting.

New Business:

Ms. Moore suggested that due to the closure of the agency's books in early July and the TAP reporting requirements to the Legislative Research Commission (LRC), the July commission meeting be moved to later in the month for 2021 to allow staff to focus on closing the books without utilizing overtime. New dates were discussed and will be updated on the Commission website. Also, this year's October meeting needs to be moved to earlier in the month due to a scheduling conflict. After discussion, it was agreed that the October 167th quarterly Commission meeting will now be held on the 9th instead of the 23rd.

MR. EVANS (Ms. Hatzel) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE DATE CHANGES AS DISCUSSED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Taylor advised members that a new study group for FY 21-22 has been approved that will focus on the needs of Deaf-Blind individuals in our community. The first meeting has been scheduled for September 8th, and Ms. Taylor briefly described the goals of this new study group and who will be part of the team, including Deaf-Blind individuals.

Announcements: *(All meetings will be held via Zoom unless otherwise notified)*

- Next Executive Board meeting will be held on September 11th from 1:00pm-3:00pm
- TAP Advisory Board meeting will be held on October 22nd from 1:00pm-3:00pm
- The 167th Quarterly Commission Meeting will be held October 9th from 1:00pm-3:00pm

Open Forum:

Mr. Evans mentioned that he is part of a work group formed in the Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati area to support back to school efforts. The group is providing guidance and resources to teachers, students and parents as kids reenter school. That includes masks, accommodations, remote learning systems and home needs for connecting hearing aids and cochlear implants to their learning devices as well as considerations for students that use sign language to communicate. The group is being as inclusive as possible, and any input from Commissioners is appreciated.

Ms. Perry asked if a type of public service announcement (PSA) could be developed in the form of a vlog to instruct deaf individuals on the severity of COVID-19, the importance of social distancing, actions needed if an individual tests positive and the use of masks. She stated it seems there aren't as many daily updates in American Sign Language (ASL), and the community isn't getting the information directly as they had in the past. She and Ms. Harris also asked if statistics specific to deaf and hard of hearing individuals (positive cases, deaths, etc.) can be acquired from the Governor's Office and announced occasionally. Ms. Taylor reminded members of privacy issues surrounding identification of individuals that test positive for COVID-19.

Ms. Ryan asked if the letter drafted by KCDHH to television stations regarding use of captioning could also be distributed in the Western KY area to encourage them to provide services as well. Ms. Taylor stated that Ms. Moore's approval would be needed before sharing the letter. Ms. Ryan also commented on the increase in contacts to KCDHH, as reflected on the state map in the agency report and how COVID-19 has brought communication issues into the limelight, a positive impact during a tragic time.

Ms. Taylor reminded members of the excellent vlog on the KCDHH website discussing mental health issues and suicide prevention, including an interview with a prominent mental health professional. Although the vlog is twenty-five minutes long it is well worth viewing, and members will learn how to help deal with some of the pressing mental health issues in their area.

AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS, MS. HARRIS (Ms. Kelly) MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:47 pm.