

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
167th Quarterly Commission Meeting
October 9, 2020
Zoom Meeting

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Jeannie Taylor, Ms. Susan Rieber, Ms. Nancy Perry, Ms. Gerry Gordon-Brown, Ms. Amy Hatzel, Ms. Michelle Niehaus, Ms. Edie Ryan, Mr. Eddie Runyon, Mr. Thomas Evans, Ms. Melissa Kelly, and Ms. Barbie Harris
- MEMBERS ABSENT:** Mr. George Tunstall IV, Ms. Dodie Karr and Ms. Joy Kiser
- STAFF PRESENT:** Ms. Anita Dowd, Ms. Rachel Morgan and Ms. Elise Kitchen
- COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS:** Ms. Rita Zirnheld-Anderson, Ms. Audrey Ruiz-Lambert and Ms. Laura Kogut
- VISITORS:** Ms. Linda Keeton

Ms. Taylor, Chair, called the 167th Quarterly Commission meeting to order at 1:10 p.m., introducing Ms. Linda Keeton of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet's (EWDC) Legal and Legislative Services division. She announced that Ms. Keeton would be listening to the meeting in order to learn more about the Commission and its constituency, since she serves as the Commission's liaison to the Legal and Legislative Services Division. Ms. Taylor then called for a motion to accept Ms. Donna Lawlor as proxy for Ms. Dodie Karr.

MS. GORDON-BROWN (Mr. Evans) MOVED TO ACCEPT MS. LAWLOR AS PROXY FOR MS. DODIE KARR. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Gordon-Brown, Secretary, called roll, confirming there was a quorum. Ms. Taylor reminded the Board Ms. Moore would be undergoing surgery later that day and shared that Ms. Moore assured her the work of the Commission would continue in her absence, and she has complete confidence in her staff. She also expressed her gratitude for the Commissioners' work on behalf of the deaf and hard of hearing in Kentucky. Ms. Taylor stated that Ms. Moore feels very positive about the surgery and looks forward to being back in the office. Ms. Taylor confirmed that Ms. Dowd would give the Agency Report on Ms. Moore's behalf, and Ms. Morgan would give the Finance Report.

Ms. Taylor requested that Board members review the minutes from the 166th Commission Meeting. There were no comments.

MS. GORDON-BROWN (Mr. Runyon) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE 166TH QUARTERLY COMMISSION MEETING AS WRITTEN. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

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

MR. RUNYON (Ms. Harris) 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, stating that the primary topic of conversation was the Mask Up Kentucky campaign, specifically the ClearMask distribution project. She said KCDHH has partnered with several organizations including the Kentucky Hospital Association, Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) Outreach, Kentucky Hands & Voices, the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) Long-Term Care Ombudsman program and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities to distribute ClearMasks to people who work with deaf and hard of hearing individuals. She added that the project has helped to raise awareness regarding the needs of deaf and hard of hearing Kentuckians.

Ms. Taylor stated that study group reports were provided during the meeting, including the first report by the Kentucky Deaf-Blind Community study group and an update by the Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition study group regarding the Language Acquisition Advisory Board. She indicated more information would be provided when Ms. Hatzel shared her study group report.

Ms. Taylor congratulated the Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD) representative, Ms. Harris, and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) representative, Mr. Runyon, on their reappointment to the Board and reminded members that three Board representatives' terms will expire in June 2021. She added that officer elections will be held in April 2021, and while it may seem a long way off, there is only one meeting between now and then, so members should give some consideration as to whether or not they would like to serve in that capacity. Ms. Taylor also announced that the KCDHH Executive Director, Ms. Moore, was the recipient of the Amici Linguarum Award and will receive the Communicator of the Year Award from the Public Relations Society of America, Bluegrass Chapter, in October.

Ms. Taylor requested that members refrain from using the Chat feature during meetings except during breaks, to notify the Chair of a personal emergency, or as a last resort to alert the Chair that someone wishes to be recognized and has been unable to get the Chair's attention. She explained that use of this feature has become a distraction and noted that the "Guiding Principles for Productive Meetings" in the KCDHH Operating Policies clearly states that members should refrain from participating in side conversations. Board members indicated their support, and Ms. Taylor concluded her report.

Agency:

Beginning with a status report on personnel, Ms. Dowd stated that Human Resources contacted KCDHH requesting that the agency confirm the need for the two vacant positions of Executive Administrative Secretary and Administrative Specialist II, as they considered abolishing them. Ms. Dowd informed the Board that justification for the positions was submitted, and both positions are now safe. She stated that Ms. Moore is requesting recommendations from Board members regarding potential applicants for the Executive Administrative Assistant position, as she would like to fill that as soon as possible. She also reminded the Board that in accordance with the EWDC's COVID-19 Guidelines, 75% of KCDHH staff members are telecommuting and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Ms. Dowd drew the Board's attention to the multiple partnerships the Executive Director has been able to foster and develop due to the exposure the agency has received as a result of her role interpreting for the Governor's press conferences. She also noted that Ms. Moore is continuing to attend virtual meetings of the National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH) to participate in the sharing of information at the national level, especially regarding providing access during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, Ms. Dowd highlighted Ms. Moore's meeting with the Executive Director of the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council regarding additional training for law enforcement due to the ongoing protests. She stated the Executive Director suggested KCDHH do a training workshop with 911 operators who are the first line of communication for officers in the field. She indicated there was also some discussion of KCDHH providing sensitivity training related to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Ms. Dowd also mentioned the ongoing collaboration with the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. She indicated that they recognize hearing loss is an area they've struggled to address, and they hope to work with KCDHH to improve their ability to provide veterans with the information and resources they need to help them adapt and overcome.

Ms. Dowd announced that KCDHH is working with several individuals including KCDHH Commissioner, Mr. Evans, to put forth a proposal requesting Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds through the Center for Accessible living (CAL). The funds would be earmarked for the purpose of installing sound fields in classrooms across the state in order to mitigate the issue of muffled speech with the use of face masks. When pressed for details regarding placement of the sound fields within the schools, Ms. Dowd stated that the details have not yet been determined, as the project is still in the early stages of development. Mr. Evans added that in addition to installing these sound fields in existing schools, the group intends to work toward changing and improving regulations to ensure that all newly constructed schools will have built-in sound fields, and the remaining existing schools will develop a plan to retrofit one or more of their classrooms with the same type of technology.

Concerning the Access Center, Ms. Dowd reported that the Norma Lewis Testing Center is back in business following the initial closure due to COVID-19 restrictions. She assured

the Board that appropriate safety measures are in place to ensure that staff and test candidates are protected.

In conclusion, Ms. Dowd provided the Board with a brief summary of the Information Referral and Advocacy (IRA) department's activities. She indicated that the partnership with the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (KDLA) is moving forward, and they are looking forward to using their courier system to be able to provide a much wider range of materials to consumers. In addition to their regular duties, Ms. Dowd stated that several staff members have taken advantage of the opportunity to do some online training, and the three staff members in the IRA department have been working toward getting their ADA Coordinator Certification through their online program. Ms. Dowd added that she and Ms. Niehaus as well as several others in Kentucky have registered for online training through the National Deaf Center regarding deaf mentors. She indicated that the group intends to meet when the training has concluded to determine what can be done to make deaf mentorship programs a reality in Kentucky.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Finance:

Ms. Morgan began her report by informing the Board that the State Budget Director issued a request for all agencies to submit a preliminary budget reduction plan in the amount of 8%, which for KCDHH is \$77,600. She stated that the combination of vacancy savings from the two vacant positions, postponing backfilling the Administrative Specialist II position until December, and projected travel and outreach savings will be enough to cover the cut if necessary. She said the state is hoping to receive federal funds to support state budgets through the federal CARES Act, but if that doesn't happen, budget cuts will need to be made. In response to the Chair's inquiry as to when those cuts will be announced, Ms. Morgan stated that no additional details were provided in that regard. Ms. Rieber confirmed that budget cuts hinge on whether or not additional federal CARES Act funding is provided, and nothing will be determined until we hear from the federal government or if changes are made during the legislative session.

THE FINANCE REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition:

Ms. Hatzel reported that the study group has been at a standstill since March. She said the two initiatives that were met with so much enthusiasm and support in fall 2019 through early spring 2020 have been greatly impacted by the initial COVID-19 restrictions and subsequent procedural changes. Ms. Hatzel reviewed the initiatives beginning with the Preschool Hearing Screenings, reminding the Board that although legislation was drafted, they were requested to hold off and attempt to work with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) once again. She stated that following meetings with KDE, during which they assured the group that they were working to put something in place, the study group agreed to wait; however, despite repeated requests over the last six months, they've heard nothing. Ms. Hatzel informed the Board that in the absence of any type of communications with KDE concerning their plan to implement pre-K audiology screening, the study group recommends that KCDHH move forward with submitting the legislation

that was put on hold during the last legislative session. She emphasized that the clock is ticking for these children who are falling exponentially further behind, not even taking into account the additional obstacles associated with online learning, and they have less and less time to try to remediate their losses.

Regarding the second initiative concerning the development of an Early Childhood Language Acquisition Advisory Board, Ms. Hatzel reminded the Board that pre-COVID, the group was in the process of putting together a list of potential representatives for this Advisory Board based on the promise of funding through the Lt. Governor's office. She reported that the funding is currently in limbo due to a variety of reasons, most of which are tied to the reallocation of funds to support COVID-19 related initiatives and shortfalls. As a result, the study group recommends drafting a letter to the Lt. Governor reemphasizing the additional negative impacts COVID-19 is having on students with hearing loss who are in desperate need of early language exposure and instruction and seeking guidance as to what can be done to get the funds released. If there is no way to get the funds, Ms. Hatzel suggested that they request assistance from the Lt. Governor's office to build the network necessary to move forward with the Language Acquisition Advisory Board. Ms. Rieber indicated that the letter may be unnecessary as the Lt. Governor's office has been working with the EWDC, Human Resources (HR), and the budget office to address the funding issue. She said the funding was approved, but somehow it fell through the cracks in the rush to mitigate the Unemployment Insurance (UI) issues; however, she assured the Board that it is being addressed.

Kentucky Deaf-Blind Community:

Ms. Taylor reported that the study group had their first meeting September 8, during which members were introduced to each other and the study group outline was reviewed. She stated that the primary goal for the first three months is to develop a fact sheet in three different formats to ensure that the target audiences all have access. Ms. Taylor explained that the fact sheet for the general public will look much like the other ones KCDHH distributes, while the one for those in the deaf-blind community who have functional levels of hearing and/or vision will be designed in such a way as to maximize the use of assistive technology devices such as screen readers, and the third format will be Braille. She indicated that the group plans to contact the American Printing House in Louisville to inquire about printing the fact sheet in Braille, as they have done work for the Commission before.

Ms. Taylor stated that the group is scheduled to meet again in December to finalize the fact sheet and talk about next steps. She said the next three months will be spent developing a digital resource guide as well as selecting books for the KCDHH Deaf Resource Library that could benefit the deaf-blind community.

Open Forum:

Ms. Taylor announced that three people requested to address the Board and allotted five minutes for each person based on the time limit set in the agenda.

Ms. Gordon-Brown announced that she would like to take a moment to honor Ms. Moore at the January Commission meeting for her role in providing interpreting services for the Governor's press conferences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Gordon-Brown indicated that waiting until the January meeting allows time for both Ms. Moore and herself to heal after surgery, as she will have knee surgery on October 23rd. Board members indicated their support.

Ms. Niehaus updated the Board that her department recently lost two of their three therapists, so they have begun a national search for deaf therapists who are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). She indicated that their second choice would be hearing therapists who are fluent in ASL, but they would prefer to find therapists who are deaf themselves.

Ms. Niehaus also announced that they recently received funding to develop their peer support program, so they are recruiting deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind individuals who have experienced a mental health issue or substance use disorder and are willing to share their recovery stories openly in public. She added that recruits will go through a 40-hour training in March in Louisville, after which they could potentially be paid as part-time employees through her department or hired in local community mental health centers to provide direct peer support. Ms. Niehaus shared that her department has seen an uptick in the number of people identified with substance use disorder, but they have received funding to provide interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing individuals who need them at treatment programs in Kentucky. Their current Certified Peer Support Specialist has office hours in Louisville and is also doing individual virtual meetings as well as in person meetings if there's an opportunity to meet outside in a safe environment. Ms. Ryan asked clarifying questions regarding qualifications for the therapist positions, which Ms. Niehaus answered. Ms. Taylor encouraged Commissioners to do their best to ensure that the information on this topic that Ms. Niehaus provides in her emails is disseminated through their organizations to the community.

Ms. Lawlor provided an update on KAD's activities, noting they recently had their first online meeting with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), which included representatives from all over the country. She also said they will be hosting a workshop focused on teaching deaf and hard of hearing individuals how to use Zoom. Ms. Lawlor indicated that there will be another NAD meeting October 24th to prioritize their top five goals.

New Business:

Ms. Taylor stated that upcoming legislation is the primary focus for the Commission in the coming months. She said she is in full agreement with Ms. Hatzel that the Commission cannot stand by and wait any longer for the pandemic to be over or until things get better to move forward with the hearing screening legislation drafted in 2019. Therefore, Ms. Taylor asked for a motion from the floor to support seeking sponsorship for a hearing screening bill to be put forth during the 2021 legislative session.

MR. RUNYON (Ms. Ryan) MOVED TO PURSUE LEGISLATION FOR HEARING SCREENINGS DURING THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Having previously discussed drafting a letter to the Lt. Governor regarding funding and support for the development of the Early Childhood Language Acquisition Advisory Board, Ms. Taylor clarified the intent of the letter with Ms. Hatzel and requested support from the Board regarding moving forward with this. Several Board members made affirming comments. Ms. Niehaus requested that the Board be privy to the content of the letter before it is sent and asked the amount of the funding that was promised. Ms. Hatzel explained that the letter is to show the Board's support for the development of the Advisory Board and to request delivery of the funding originally promised by the Lt. Governor in addition to networking support as it is being developed. In addition, she requested that the letter be held by the Chair until such time as it becomes apparent that it is needed. Ms. Hatzel also suggested that it should be sent by the Chair on behalf of the Board if the determination is made that it is necessary.

MR. RUNYON (Mr. Evans) MOVED TO SUPPORT DRAFTING A LETTER TO LT. GOVERNOR COLEMAN IN SUPPORT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION ADVISORY BOARD TO BE USED AT THE DISCRETION OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE ACCESS AND ACQUISITION STUDY GROUP. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

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

- The next Executive Board meeting will be held December 4, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- TAP Advisory Board meeting will be held October 22, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- The 168th Quarterly Commission meeting will be held January 22, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- Ms. Perry announced that Deaf Day is coming up at the Ark Encounter museum. She added that the Louisville and Lexington Associations for the Deaf are having regular meetings, and members can check online for specific dates and times.
- Mr. Evans announced that he has been appointed by the Speech-Language-Hearing Association to chair a newly formed committee of ambassadors with representatives from every state and U.S. territory with the goal of enhancing communication and advocacy on local, state and federal levels.

AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS, MR. EVANS (Ms. Ryan) MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.