

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
185th Quarterly Commission Meeting
April 25th, 2025
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tommy Evans, Melissa Kelly, Michelle Niehaus, Jason Smith, Jeannie Taylor, Nancy Perry, Barbie Harris, Sarah Roof, Mona McCubbin, Marva Johnson, Alexander Ansley, Anita Dowd, ELC Secretary Jamie Link, Amy Hatzel (Emeritus)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Gerry Gordon-Brown, John Perry

STAFF PRESENT: Anita Dowd, Rachel Morgan, Emily Kimbell, Blake Campbell, Mikayla Qualls

COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS: Laura Kogut, Linda Bozeman, Shannon Grider

VISITORS: None

MR. EVANS CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 12:36 PM.

Mr. Evans asked the Commissioners to review the previous meeting's minutes and to suggest any changes. Ms. Dowd noted a correction on page 4: "KBI" should be "KYRID" regarding the spring conference plans.

MS. TAYLOR MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS COMMISSION MEETING WITH MS. DOWD'S REVISION. MS. HARRIS SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.

MS. HARRIS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING AS READ. MS. KELLY SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.

Reports

Chair's Report

Mr. Evans began by reporting that Gerry Gordon-Brown (KAD) and Alexander Ansley (A.G. Bell) have been reappointed to their Commission seats by Governor Beshear. He also mentioned that most evaluations for Executive Director Anita Dowd had been received.

A significant portion of the Chair's report focused on the Board Composition Review. This review, initiated by feedback suggesting a need to restructure the board, is

intended to ensure optimal representation for the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. A subcommittee developed proposed changes, and a survey was conducted to gauge Commissioners' opinions. The recent survey results showed overwhelming support for several additions: a service provider for deaf and blind individuals (15 yes), replacing AARP with an aging and independent living representative (14 yes), a vocational rehabilitation representative (14 yes), an educational service provider (15 yes), two consumers at large who are deaf or hard of hearing (14 yes), and two service providers who are deaf or hard of hearing (14 yes).

Regarding the implementation of the proposed changes, Ms. Dowd explained that since KCDHH was established by statute, any changes will require action by the General Assembly. She is currently researching state guidelines and regulations concerning board composition, particularly regarding Governor-appointed seats and other potential restrictions, to ensure compliance before finalizing any decisions. Ms. Taylor stressed the importance of understanding these next steps and potential risks, especially concerning the opening of statutes. ELC Secretary Link offered his office's assistance in researching the necessary legal framework. Ms. Dowd confirmed she had already begun discussions with the cabinet and expressed a desire to address this under the current administration, citing a supportive environment. Ms. McCubbin and Mr. Evans highlighted the need to balance statutory requirements with community needs and maintain the representation of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals on the board. Ms. Niehaus pointed out that many relevant statutes were written shortly after the ADA and that representation needs have evolved. Mr. Evans thanked everyone for their input.

On a personal note, Mr. Evans shared that this would be his last meeting as Chair due to increasing personal commitments, though he will remain on the board. He expressed his gratitude for the board's support during his tenure. The Commissioners also expressed their thanks to Mr. Evans for his service.

THE CHAIR'S REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Agency Report

Ms. Dowd began the Agency Report by noting staffing changes. She celebrated the hiring of Mikayla Qualls as Interpreter II and noted that decisions on the Executive Administrative Secretary and Information Officer positions were pending.

Ms. Dowd next reported on a recent "Common Ground" meeting involving various organizations serving deaf and hard-of-hearing children. She highlighted ongoing challenges with Kentucky's early intervention system, stating it often fails to appropriately serve all eligible children despite regulation changes. The agency is

exploring ways to navigate these issues and is working to align with new HERSA grant requirements for the EHDI system, which now emphasize language acquisition. This led to a discussion about board representation for early intervention: Mr. Evans suggested adding an early intervention representative to the board. Ms. Niehaus proposed that a Public Health representative (where early intervention is housed) could take her current CHFS seat. Ms. Roof suggested a mandated early intervention position on the board. Secretary Link inquired about the fiscal impact of potential legislation, and while no specific costs were put forward, the cost of *not* serving the community was noted.

Regarding the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), Ms. Dowd shared plans to meet with KDE representatives to foster a supportive relationship. Ms. Dowd expressed that a significant goal for KCDHH is to become a testing site for various interpreter certifications to help address the shortage of qualified interpreters in schools. Nancy Perry underscored the problem of schools hiring individuals with inadequate sign language skills and emphasized the need for proper certification like the SLPI.

Turning to new developments, Ms. Dowd noted a growing relationship between KCDHH and the Department of Dementia. The Department is increasingly recognizing the link between hearing loss and dementia and plans to integrate hearing loss considerations into its initiatives, including public education and support for the DHH community regarding dementia care.

Mr. Evans stressed the lack of coverage for hearing aids under Kentucky Medicaid for adults, contrasting it with Ohio's policy. While a recent bill in the Kentucky General Assembly for children's hearing aids showed promise, it did not pass due to time constraints. Concerns were raised about over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids, with Ms. Dowd highlighting the problems of improper fitting and user discouragement. Past attempts to include hearing aids in the Telecommunication Access Program (TAP) were recalled by Ms. Taylor and Rachel Morgan, noting the complexities involved. Mr. Smith questioned the discrepancy in insurance coverage between cochlear implants and hearing aids. Mr. Evans clarified that Medicare generally does not cover hearing aids, while Medicaid coverage varies by state.

To conclude, Ms. Dowd provided an update on the Moore Safe Nights Program. Issues with some radios not functioning correctly are being addressed, with distribution paused until the issues have been resolved. The volunteer nature of local emergency management personnel presents challenges in troubleshooting.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Before New Business began, Laura Kogut was recognized for her many years of service as a CART provider for the Commission. Commissioners thanked her and wished her well on her upcoming retirement.

Old Business/New Business/Open Forum

To open the Commission's yearly elections, Ms. Kelly was re-elected as the Service Provider representative. Ms. Hatzel and Ms. Taylor were unanimously approved as Board Emeritus members for a one-year term.

In the Executive Board officer elections, Ms. McCubbin was elected as the new Chair. Ms. Roof was elected as Vice-Chair. After a self-nomination from Ms. Harris and the existing nomination for Ms. Kelly, Ms. Kelly was elected as Secretary. Ms. Taylor reminded the board that the new officers would select two members at large for the Executive Board, and anyone interested in serving should express that to the new leadership. Mr. Evans assured Ms. McCubbin of a transition meeting and ongoing support for the new Executive Board.

Announcements

Mr. Evans announced that the next Executive Board meeting will be held on June 6, 2025, via Zoom. The next full Commission meeting will be on July 25, 2025, in person at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet in Frankfort, from 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm.

MS. PERRY MOVED TO ADJOURN. MS. KELLY SECONDED. The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 pm.