

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
186th Quarterly Commission Meeting
July 25th, 2025
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tommy Evans, Melissa Kelly, 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), Anthony Adkins (proxy for Michelle Niehaus)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Marva Johnson, John Perry, Gerry Gordon-Brown

STAFF PRESENT: Emily Kimbell, Justin Stanley, Sam Kapsal

COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS: Tracy Lundergan, Linda Bozeman, Shannon Grider

VISITORS: None

Ms. McCubbin called the meeting to order at 12:31 pm.

Ms. McCubbin asked the Commissioners to review the previous meeting's minutes and to suggest any changes.

MR. EVANS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS COMMISSION MEETING AS READ. MR. SMITH SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.

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

Reports

Chair's Report

Ms. McCubbin provided an update on three board positions that have been submitted to the Governor's office for appointment. Ms. Dowd clarified that the Governor's office has requested three nominees for each position. In the interim, Ms. Taylor will continue representing HLAA, Mr. Evans will continue representing KSHA, and Ms. Perry will continue for KAD.

Ms. McCubbin announced that Ms. Harris and Ms. Niehaus were selected to serve as members at large on the executive committee. Ms. Harris accepted the position.

A discussion was held regarding the implementation of a shared Google Drive for commission documents and sharing quarterly reports. Mr. Evans offered to assist with the technical setup. Ms. Dowd noted that using the Google Drive is optional and not mandatory for commissioners.

THE CHAIR'S REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Agency Report

Ms. Dowd then presented the Agency Report. She began by clarifying the report's format, explaining that KCDHH's activities are tied to the 2024-2026 strategic plan goals, which are listed on the first page of the report.

Ms. Dowd first reported on a successful presentation at the annual dementia conference held by the Department of Aging and Independent Living, which highlighted the significant link between hearing loss and aging. She noted that four of the ten signs of dementia match signs of hearing loss, and there is a growing body of research showing a correlation between the two.

Ms. Dowd then discussed the potential for federal funding cuts to the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program. Ms. Roof added that while the funding situation is uncertain, newborn hearing screening is mandated by state law in Kentucky and will continue regardless of federal funding. Ms. Dowd also mentioned that the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has now tasked EHDI programs with responsibility for language acquisition, leading to the formation of a new language acquisition work group in Kentucky. The agency has also begun collaborating with the Regional Early Acquisition of Language (REAL) program based at the Alabama School for the Deaf.

Ms. Dowd emphasized the importance of seeing hearing loss as a public health issue and expressed her intention to educate the public, stating that hearing loss is often viewed exclusively as a disability issue. She shared some statistics, noting that approximately 15.5% of Kentuckians (one in six people) have a hearing loss, making it the third largest health issue in the Commonwealth after heart disease and arthritis.

Ms. Roof connected the issue to the Governor's "Healthy Kentucky Home" initiative, particularly its focus on decreasing social isolation. Mr. Evans emphasized the need to involve major stakeholders, such as state physician groups and legislators, to push for systemic change, referencing stalled legislation for insurance coverage of hearing aids. Both Ms. Perry and Ms. Harris noted the increasing social isolation among the deaf community, contrasting the large social gatherings of the past with the present-day reliance on technology.

In response, Mr. Smith suggested organizing more social events across the Commonwealth to combat isolation and better understand community needs. Ms. McCubbin proposed tangible actions, such as writing a letter to the editor for statewide distribution and creating a Public Service Announcement (PSA) with help from media contacts. Ms. Dowd stressed the importance of stakeholders like KSD, Heuser, and Lexington Hearing and Speech presenting a unified message that hearing loss is a public health emergency.

Ms. Roof suggested pursuing a Governor's proclamation for Deaf Awareness Month and developing a strategic public health campaign that shares personal stories, which are more memorable than data. Mr. Evans agreed.

The discussion concluded with a consensus that a more organized, unified effort is needed to raise public awareness and affect change.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Old Business/New Business/Open Forum

Ms. McCubbin began by reporting that a subcommittee is being formed to continue discussions on the board restructuring, with the goal of presenting information at the next commission meeting.

Ms. Dowd addressed comments from her evaluation regarding community events, clarifying that the agency's mandate is for systemic advocacy, not direct service or event hosting. She announced a major project to rebuild the KCDHH website to comply with federal accessibility requirements by a 2026 deadline. This project will involve simplifying content and eliminating over a thousand PDF documents, which are not friendly to deaf-blind users.

Ms. Dowd briefly presented the annual Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) report that is submitted to the Legislative Research Commission (LRC).

The commission will again partner with Heuser Hearing Institute for a booth at the State Fair. Ms. Dowd called for commissioners to volunteer. Ms. Perry volunteered.

Announcements

- Mr. Smith announced the Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD) biennial convention will take place on October 12-13 in Louisville.

- Ms. Roof announced that Deaf Awareness Day at the Louisville Zoo, hosted by Kentucky Hands & Voices, will be on August 16. Due to sponsorships, children will receive free tickets, and the immediate families of deaf or hard of hearing children aged three and under will also get free tickets.
- Ms. Taylor reminded the board that the HLAA Kentucky Walk4Hearing will be held on September 14 at Tom Sawyer Park in Louisville.
- Mr. Smith announced that the Kentucky School for the Deaf Alumni Association (KSDAA) and KAD will hold a joint event on September 6, with a Deaf Night Out featuring an ASL movie on the evening of September 5.
- Ms. Roof asked for an update on DeaFest. Ms. Dowd confirmed that KCDHH is planning for its return next year.

MS. HARRIS MOVED TO ADJOURN. MR. EVANS SECONDED. The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 pm.