

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
171st Quarterly Commission Meeting
October 29, 2021
Zoom Meeting

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Amy Hatzel, Ms. Jeannie Taylor, Mr. Thomas Evans, Ms. Barbie Harris, Ms. Gerry Gordon-Brown, Ms. Nancy Perry, Ms. Melissa Kelly, Mr. Eddie Runyon, Ms. Dodie Karr, Ms. Edie Ryan, Ms. Olivia Renfro, and Mr. Alexander Ansley
- MEMBERS ABSENT:** Mr. George “Buzzy” Tunstall IV and Ms. Barbie Harris (Ms. Harris attended 2nd half of meeting)
- STAFF PRESENT:** Ms. Virginia Moore and Ms. Elise Kitchen
- PROXY:** Ms. Nina Coyer (proxy for 1st half of meeting)
- COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS:** Ms. Rachel Rodgers, Ms. Rita Zirnheld-Anderson and Ms. Laura Kogut
- VISITORS:** Ms. Nina Coyer (visitor for 2nd half of meeting)

Ms. Hatzel, Chair, called the 171st Quarterly Commission meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and welcomed Ms. Olivia Renfro, designee for the Secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC), to the Board. After a brief introduction, Ms. Hatzel also re-introduced Mr. Ansley and welcomed him to his first Commission meeting as a voting member, having recently attended his Commissioner orientation. Ms. Hatzel recognized Ms. Coyer as proxy for Ms. Harris until such time as she could join the meeting, and Mr. Evans, Secretary, called the roll. After confirming there was a quorum, Ms. Hatzel requested that Board members review the minutes from the 170th Commission Meeting.

MS. GORDON-BROWN (Ms. Karr) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE 170TH QUARTERLY COMMISSION MEETING AS WRITTEN. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Ms. Hatzel requested that members review the minutes from the Executive Board meeting held in September. Ms. Taylor noted that she had requested during that meeting that the Kentucky Deaf-Blind Community Study Group members be permitted to attend the 172nd Commission meeting in January rather than the current meeting in October.

MR. EVANS (Ms. Gordon-Brown) MOVED TO ACCEPT THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES WITH THE NOTED CORRECTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

REPORTS

Executive Board:

Ms. Hatzel referred Board members to the minutes and indicated there have been no updates since that meeting. She then directed the Board’s attention to the Robert’s Rules “cheat sheet” included in the packet and explained that it is intended to be used as a guide during meetings to help members understand and follow meeting protocols. Ms. Hatzel added that an updated term

grid and contact list were also included in the packet. In closing, Ms. Hatzel stated that TAP Advisory Board vacancies were addressed during the Executive Board meeting and recommendations will be discussed during the Agency Report.

THE EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Agency:

Ms. Moore began her report by announcing the Lt. Governor's resignation as Secretary of the EWDC in order to focus all of her attention on her role as Lt. Governor and added that the current Deputy Secretary has stepped in as Acting Secretary until the position can be filled permanently.

Ms. Moore stated that the agency budget for FY2020-22 was recently submitted and included a request for an additional position for the Access Center – Interpreter Supervisor. She explained that there is a need to monitor interpreter fees and establish a state fee for consistency, which will be a cost saving measure for the state. Ms. Niehaus noted that the online request form for interpreter coordination is currently not available and suggested that KCDHH may want to consider waiting until that form is available again before taking on the additional burden of billing. Ms. Moore stated that the new database still has issues, some of which are related to the online request forms. She said the database development team is no longer working with unemployment insurance, so they have been working closely with staff on a daily basis to resolve those issues.

Ms. Moore reported that the Governor is continuing to provide weekly COVID-19 updates on Mondays at 4:00 p.m. and Team Kentucky reports on Thursdays at 12:30, which KCDHH will continue to interpret. She stated that the COVID-19 infection rate is continuing to drop in Kentucky, and the vaccinations for children are expected to be released in the first week of November.

Ms. Moore shared that KCDHH staff and volunteers received seven awards at the Kentucky Association of Government Communicators (KAGC) 2021 Awards of Excellence ceremony, thanks in part to the Information Office Supervisor's thorough submissions.

Regarding DeaFestival, Ms. Moore indicated that the team is still waiting to hear back from Centre College, which would be the first choice of venue for the event based on the tour. She said the team anticipates hearing back from them within the next two weeks, and she will keep the Board apprised.

Ms. Moore informed the Board that her term on the Executive Board of the National Association of State Administrators for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH) has come to an end, but she is still strongly affiliated with the organization. Ms. Moore reported that there was recently a push to work with the states' Departments of Aging to work toward developing a model for the delivery of long-term services and supports for senior citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing. She stated that there will be a study group working to try to develop new policy at the national level related to caring for seniors who have hearing loss, which will hopefully trickle down to state agencies as well. Ms. Gordon-Brown expressed her appreciation of these efforts, and Ms. Niehaus offered to provide an email introduction to the new Commissioner for the Department of Aging and Independent Living.

Ms. Moore shared that she recently attended ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Residences of Courtyard Crossing in Independence, Kentucky, which is the long-awaited accessible housing for seniors. She reported that the 43 unit complex has multiple features designed to meet the accessibility needs of deaf and hard of hearing seniors, and the community room is dedicated to Betty Timon, who was a tireless advocate for deaf and hard of hearing seniors in Northern

Kentucky. Ms. Moore stated that there will be an open house event on November 5, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. to allow the public to tour the complex and get more information. In response to questions from Board members, Ms. Moore added that they will have a social services professional on site as well as a recreation coordinator, and while those professionals are not fluent in ASL, property management personnel assured her they will hire interpreters as needed. Mr. Runyon suggested that KCDHH recommend partnering with Hands & Voices or local ASL teachers to offer sign language classes at the Betty Timon Community Center to foster awareness and improve communication among residents and staff. Ms. Moore suggested that Ms. Kelly, who lives in that area may be a good place to start, and Ms. Kelly indicated she would look into it.

Ms. Moore congratulated and thanked Ms. Niehaus and the Interpreter Referral Specialist for their hard work with the Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) Collaboration Group that has opened so many doors with DCBS in terms of providing services to deaf and hard of hearing families. Ms. Niehaus expressed her gratitude for the Interpreter Referral Specialist's hard work and dedication to the "Just in Time Training" project, which is about to officially launch their training online. She also noted that Aetna is going to provide "value-added benefits" and explained what that would look like for deaf and hard of hearing children in foster care. She requested recommendations from Commissioners for language mentors and/or deaf mentors all across the Commonwealth and fielded questions regarding the details.

Ms. Moore reported that Kentucky is experiencing an economic boom, and with the number of well-paying jobs coming into the state, it is important that KCDHH promote awareness of these employment opportunities. She indicated that the hiring manual that is being developed by the TAP Program Administrator through the Emerging Leaders Program could be very helpful.

Ms. Moore also reported that KCDHH is still providing the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) Performance and Interview Exam on Fridays; however, she indicated that she would re-evaluate the number of days the test is offered, if the demand increases. She added that the agency has been approached about offering vouchers for the test, which is something that has been done in the past, but she said she will not entertain that possibility until the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) hires a CEO and fills the vacancies on their Board.

In closing, Ms. Moore requested that an item be added to the agenda under "New Business". She stated that there was a reporting error regarding the composition of the TAP Advisory Board relative to the expiring terms, and as a result there are more applicants than there are available positions. However, she noted that there is only one deaf candidate, and the vacancy is for a deaf consumer, so the Board will simply need to vote to approve that candidate as the new Deaf Consumer Representative.

MR. RUNYON (Ms. Harris) MOVED TO ADD "TAP ADVISORY BOARD VOTE" TO THE AGENDA UNDER NEW BUSINESS. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Finance:

Ms. Moore stated that it appears that the state is solvent, and it is unlikely that there will be any budget cuts this legislative session. She added that she hopes they will entertain a cost of living raise for state employees, as they have not had a raise in over ten years. Ms. Moore reported the TAP recently placed a large order for equipment for applications approved through the end of September, which means orders are current; however due to the timing of the report, that

expenditure is not reflected. She indicated that the program has gone back to a \$50,000 monthly limit for equipment orders, prioritizing first-time applicants before reapplicants.

THE FINANCE REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Early Childhood Language Access and Acquisition:

Ms. Hatzel reminded the Board that she and Ms. Moore as well as the Executive Staff Advisor, Policy Specialist and Kentucky Hands & Voices (H&V) Director and Assistant Director met at the KCDHH office in August to discuss First Steps' regulations and policies and identify and document the areas that need to be revised as part of their internal process. She explained that one of the key items identified is the need for a separate service coordinator who has the necessary knowledge of deaf and hard of hearing issues as well as experience in working with children who are deaf and hard of hearing and their families. Ms. Hatzel stated that the resulting recommendations were submitted to the Department for Public Health (DPH) Assistant Director, who said he planned to share them with the regulations review team to discuss and potentially incorporate them into their revisions. She pointed out that those recommendations were submitted in August, and although KCDHH has reached out to follow up, the Assistant Director has not yet provided an update. She indicated that she anticipates receiving feedback on the incorporation of those recommendations soon.

Ms. Hatzel stated that the study group intends to circle back to the Governor's Office of Early Childhood and renew their collaboration efforts to encourage the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to institute a better hearing screening for children entering kindergarten. She shared her frustration that KDE still has not reached out to discuss how and when they intend to accomplish that, despite assurances during the last legislative session that it could be accomplished without the use of legislative force. Ms. Moore indicated that she intends to request a meeting with the Commissioner of KDE and will notify him that the KCDHH Board is pushing for a legislative solution. Ms. Karr stated that the Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD) would like to lend their support to these efforts as well as any efforts to get a LEAD-K (Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids) bill passed in Kentucky.

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

Kentucky Deaf-Blind Community:

Ms. Taylor reported the study group is very close to wrapping up, and the final meeting is scheduled for December 7. She pointed out that the quarterly study group report shows the group's progress since September and expressed her appreciation of members' participation in the study group's work. She announced that the Policy Specialist would be providing a guided virtual tour of the Deaf-Blind pages, which will house the majority of the information and resources gathered by the study group, including the Resource Guide, Fact Sheets, Informational Videos, and links to outside resources.

Following the virtual tour of the Deaf-Blind pages, several Commissioners expressed their appreciation for the wealth of information and resources pertaining to deaf-blindness that will be available to the public through KCDHH's website. Ms. Karr inquired about equipment that could help Deaf-Blind individuals access library resources, and Ms. Niehaus suggested putting a link on the Deaf-Blind pages to the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) National Registry for people with combined hearing and vision loss in order to encourage more people to register. Ms. Taylor

and Ms. Moore provided clarification regarding those concerns, which concluded the study group report.

THE KENTUCKY DEAF-BLIND COMMUNITY STUDY GROUP REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

BOARD OPEN FORUM

Ms. Hatzel announced that there would be no additional Open Forum as the virtual tour of the Deaf-Blind pages filled that time slot.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Ms. Hatzel re-opened the discussion regarding meeting virtually versus in person and informed Board members that the Executive Board voted to recommend that the Commission adopt the World Health Organization's safety recommendation for in person gatherings. She explained that this would mean holding all meetings virtually until/unless the statewide COVID rate is 5% or lower and testing is widespread. Ms. Niehaus added that a hybrid meeting format makes it extremely difficult to ensure communication access and significantly increases the cost as well.

MS. NIEHAUS (Ms. Taylor) MOVED THAT MOVING FORWARD, ALL COMMISSION MEETINGS BE HELD VIRTUALLY UNTIL THE STATEWIDE COVID RATE IS 5% OR LOWER AND TESTING IS WIDESPREAD. AT THAT TIME THE BOARD WILL DISCUSS AND VOTE ON RETURNING TO IN PERSON MEETINGS. OFFERING A HYBRID OPTION IS NOT FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE AND POSES SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES TO ENSURING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR ALL COMMISSIONERS, STAFF, AND VISITORS. THE MOTION PASSED.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Hatzel requested a vote to approve Orris J. Disney II as the new Deaf Consumer Representative on the TAP Advisory Board, and he was subsequently appointed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Hatzel informed the Board that the proposal for the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan will be forthcoming at the January meeting. Ms. Moore stated that staff will be revisiting the strategic plan to determine what changes need to be made, and a rough draft will be presented to the Executive Board at the December meeting. She said a tracking grid is also being developed to provide visible accountability for meeting those goals and added that this grid will be published quarterly as part of the Agency Report.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The next Executive Board meeting will be held December 3, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- The 172nd Quarterly Commission meeting will be held January 21, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

MR. TUNSTALL (Ms. Taylor) MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.