

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
184th Quarterly Commission Meeting
January 24th, 2025
via videoconference

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Alexander Ansley

STAFF PRESENT: Rachel Morgan, Blake Campbell, Emily Kimbell

COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS: Laura Kogut, Linda Bozeman, Shannon Grider

VISITORS: Ashley Ha

MR. EVANS CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 12:41 PM.

Mr. Evans asked Ms. Niehaus to begin the meeting by introducing Ashley Ha, a public health student who is interning with Ms. Niehaus and Anthony Adkins at the Department of Behavioral Health.

MS. TAYLOR MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS COMMISSION MEETING WITHOUT REVISION. MS. PERRY SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.

MS. HARRIS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING. MS. GORDON-BROWN SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.

Reports

Chair's Report

Mr. Evans began by reporting on the progress of the Board Composition Review Subcommittee. Thanking the Commissioners for their previous feedback, he reported that the Subcommittee's recommendations largely reflected the thinking of the Commissioners. The Subcommittee intends to release its report together with a survey to the full Commission in the next week so that feedback can be gathered in advance of the next quarterly meeting. The proposal will then be voted upon or revisited by the Subcommittee as needed, based on feedback.

THE CHAIR'S REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Agency Report

Ms. Dowd began by reporting that KCDHH is making progress toward bringing in new personnel. Rachel Morgan has accepted the role of Executive Staff Advisor, which was delayed by difficulties in the hiring process but is now final. The next targets for hiring are the Interpreter II, the Administrative Secretary, and the Information Officer positions, all of which Ms. Dowd hopes to hire in the next quarter. She is also working with HR to address the issue of wage compression among existing staff.

Ms. Dowd then noted that the Commission currently has two vacancies (One KAD and one A.G. Bell) and will soon have an additional four vacancies when current KAD, HLAA, KSHA and Service Provider Commissioners' terms expire. Mr. Evans interjected to note that he and Ms. Dowd would like to increase the number of applicants for the open positions and will be encouraging the various stakeholder groups to make their members aware of the opportunity to serve.

At Ms. Dowd's prompting, Mr. Evans noted that elections to the Commission's Executive Board and for emeritus positions would take place at the April Commission meeting.

Ms. Dowd reported that she has been in dialogue with the Department of Aging and Independent Living and the Department of Dementia to determine how they can collaborate to better serve Kentucky's aging population. These contacts are important due to the correlation between aging and hearing loss. Ms. Dowd and Blake Campbell will also attend the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's Foundation Disability Hiring Academy to educate employers regarding hiring individuals with hearing loss.

Ms. Dowd announced that a complaint for inadequate communication access against the hospital in Frankfort had been successfully resolved in the complainant's favor. She expressed hope that this outcome would encourage other medical facilities to take communication needs seriously. Mr. Smith and Ms. Perry agreed, noting their own difficulties with medical facilities.

Finally, Ms. Dowd noted that Kentucky has instituted a requirement for anyone renewing their driver's license to pass a vision screening. KCDHH is working with the Department of Transportation to ensure that the vision screening is fully accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing.

THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.

Old Business

Mr. Evans began by reporting that the shared drive for all Commissioners has been set up and is ready for use. Any Commissioners that are unfamiliar with Google suite should contact Rachel Morgan for individual training. The shared drive will contain important information such as the Commissioners' handbook, minutes from past meetings, and other information as necessary for individual roles.

Mr. Evans noted that emeritus board members would be voted on at the next Commission meeting since they must first be approved by the Executive Board.

In response to a question from Ms. Perry about a news story, Ms. Dowd noted that she had contacted the CEO of Yellow Dot to discuss a training partnership for helping the deaf communicate more effectively with law enforcement during interactions.

New Business/Open Forum

Mr. Evans began by drawing the Commissioners' attention to the recent passage of Madeline's Law in the Ohio Legislature. This law would compel insurance companies to fully cover hearing aids for the children of policyholders. Ms. Roof noted that a Kentucky Hands & Voices board member had been in contact with Senator Karen Berg and that she intended to introduce a similar measure in the 2025 Kentucky General Assembly. **(NB: Senator Berg's bill is currently pending before the General Assembly as Senate Bill 93 and is now co-sponsored by Senator Stephen Meredith).** Ms. Niehaus called Commissioners' attention to the newest book by Deaf author Clare Lezotte, entitled *Deer Run Home*. It was recently published and is targeted toward elementary to middle school-age children.

Ms. Gordon-Brown reported that she had been presented with the Virginia Mason Advocacy Award from the Hearing Loss Association of America's Kentucky chapter, and thanked Ms. Taylor for her nomination.

Ms. Johnson announced that KYRID has finalized its spring conference dates. It will take place in Frankfort on May 16th and 17th and is being held in partnership with the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Ms. Johnson also noted that she was available for any Commissioners who have questions about the pending regulatory changes for interpreters. She also noted that House Bill 39 was introduced to address the issue of educational interpreters, but that it had not yet advanced from its initial committee assignment.

Ms. Roof announced that the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Advisory Board would be holding a statewide summit on June 13th. Ms. Dowd and Ms. McCubbin expressed their strong support for EHDI's mission.

Finally, Ms. Johnson suggested that the Commission explore forming a study group at the next regular meeting. Mr. Evans agreed that it would be an appropriate agenda item.

Announcements

Mr. Evans announced that the next Executive Board meeting will be held on March 14, 2025, via Zoom. The next full Commission meeting will be on April 25, 2025, in person at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet in Frankfort, from 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm.

MS. GORDON-BROWN MOVED TO ADJOURN. MS. PERRY SECONDED. The meeting was adjourned at 3:18 pm.