

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING  
QUARTERLY MEETING: December 1, 2023  
Hybrid Meeting

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Members Present: Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Janette Fulton, Lee Sheffield, Amy Letteri, Debi Shostak, Alexander Van Hook, Becky Lorah, Joe Hohenstein, Lori Leiman

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director), Dee Dee Keiser, Joe Attaardo, Denise Brown

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley – Sassaman

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

**Review and Approval of Minutes:**

The September 2023 meeting minutes will be reviewed and approved at the March meeting.

**Presentation:**

Act 57 Presentation by Ben Moonan and Denise Brown (Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing)

- Discussed how Act 57 law came into being.
- Discussed the 3 laws we have in PA (Act 57, Act 172 and Chapter 14).
- Discussed state registered and provisionally registered interpreters.
- Discussed VRI and VRS.

**Department Reports:**

Governor –

No report

State Representative –

The hearing aid insurance bill that was discussed at the last council hearing has been introduced and is waiting on input from the chair from the insurance committee. It was recommended contacting Representative Kevin Boyle to ask him to bring the bill up for a vote.

Aging –

Accessible Pharmacy Services Partnership with the PACE Program:

The PACE Program continues to collaborate with Accessible Pharmacy Services (APS), the national leader in medication management for the blind, low-vision, and DeafBlind communities.

The Program has identified a new subset of individuals enrolled in PACE who are blind or visually impaired after a review of the medications they're taking. Letters were mailed to this group in early November requesting their participation in a pilot program.

The pilot is being made possible through the collaborative work of several entities, including PACE, Temple University, PA Dept of Health, and APS. Participants will receive free tablet computers through the PA Dept of Health and receive technical assistance and training through Tech Owl, which are students in the Department of Disabilities Studies program at Temple University. APS will then provide medication management and health education at an individual level. Data collected will assist in developing best practices for each group involved in the program.

Master Plan for Older Adults:

The Plan continues to be developed. Listening sessions and forums have ended and data analysis and a draft document are being worked on.

Referrals to Hearing/Vision Screenings:

The PACE Clearinghouse continues to receive calls for those seeking assistance who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing or require vision exams. Since January 2023, the Clearinghouse assisted and referred 123 people to vision services and 30 to hearing services.

Education –

No report

Health –

No report

Human Services –

*Department of Human Services*

The annual Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is open. LIHEAP is a federally-funded program administered by DHS that helps with home heating bills so Pennsylvanians with low incomes can stay warm and safe during the winter months. Assistance is available for renters and homeowners. The LIHEAP application period for both cash and crisis grants is open from November 1, 2023, to April 5, 2024.

Office for Long-Term Living (OLTL) will be hosting a Transportation Summit webinar on Monday, December 11, 2023, from 1:00 pm. to 4:00 pm. The Transportation

Summit is an open forum for anyone interested in transportation-related issues in the Community HealthChoices Program. There will be presentations by various staff from the Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP), the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Community HealthChoices (CHC) Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), MTM, the Coordinated Transportation Solutions (CTS) organization, etc.

OLTL - From June through August 2023, OLTL held Listen and Learn Sessions across Pennsylvania. There was a total of 16 in-person sessions and three virtual sessions where Community HealthChoices (CHC), OBRA, Act 150 and Living Independence for the Elderly (LIFE) participants, family members, and community members were able to offer input on how OLTL could improve its programs.

Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) save the date, March 25-26, 2024. The Early Childhood Conference, Stable and Secure: Supporting Children Through Trauma Sensitive Approaches will be held in Hershey PA with additional details coming.

#### *Office of Developmental Programs (ODP)*

Terp Training Series focuses on content related to autism and other intellectual/developmental disabilities. It offers virtual, live training sessions for sign language interpreters on the third Tuesday of every month 7-8:30pm. All sessions offer free CEUs. The first session was October 17th on Ableism in ASL and about 50 interpreters attended. The second session was November 21st on ASL Vocabulary in the IDD World and about 40 attended. December 19th will be on English Word Choices in IDD. For more information visit our website at <https://home.myodp.org/resources/terp-training-series/>.

The 2024 Everyday Lives Conference will be January 9-11, 2024 in Hershey PA. Conference themes include professional development for providers, wellness & resiliency, and behavioral & communication supports. For more information visit <https://everydaylives.org/>.

ODP is working with the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) to create a Deaf & Hard of Hearing Affinity Group. It is a national group where we will be discussing I/DD services for people who are deaf/hard of hearing. The first meeting is December 7th.

#### Labor and Industry –

##### *ODHH:*

ODHH serves 67 counties with a staff of five. ODHH has four primary core services for the commonwealth: *advocacy* for people who deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind, *information* for agencies, family, and individuals with hearing loss, *referrals* to appropriate organizations and *oversite* for the Sign Language Interpreter & Transliterator State Registration Act of 2004. ODHH had 5700 calls and requests

come in the agency in 2023. This was an increase from the previous year of 5057. There are 684 state registered interpreters and 54 provisional interpreters registered with ODHH.

ODHH hosted its Hearing Loss Expo on October 11 and 12. They were thrilled with the turnout of the event. Several hundred people came in and out of the doors to attend the resource fair and multiple workshops. The Secretary joined on the second day to make remarks as well as Ryan Hyde. The second day there were 4 school districts in attendance and 6 attended the pre-ETS focused schedule virtually to learn about OVR and ODHH, DHHS, and our Hiram G Andrews Center. ODHH also had one day focusing on the Deafblind community and had a deafblind panel come share about how they work with SSP's and navigate the world. ODHH is grateful to the support of Step-Up Service LLC. to ensure there were SSP's available to work with the deafblind. Overall, it was an amazing event, and ODHH looks forward to planning the next one. ODHH is incredibly grateful to the team of captioners, interpreters, technology people, speakers, and everyone in between who work tirelessly to help us pull this off.

#### SSP Program Updates:

Step Up Services continues to provide SSP Coverage to the commonwealth. ODHH is thrilled to see the numbers going up.

SSP's: 31 Statewide

Deafblind Customers: 52 customers have scheduled services since March 2023.

Number of Hours Used in October: 429.25 (Increase of 73.5 Hours from September)

#### SSP Training:

ODHH and two trainers will be hosting two trainings on December 9<sup>th</sup>. One training will be held in Lancaster and one training will be held in Pittsburgh. This will be our first time holding two trainings at the same time, however with the incredible growth of this program, we are looking forward to providing even more services across the commonwealth.

#### OVR:

Services are continuing to be provided to eligible customers. The pandemic has significantly affected the number of referrals to OVR, but the number of referrals and spending on customer services have returned to pre-pandemic level spending. Each OVR office continues to implement individual outreach plans to increase their referrals. OVR is currently having staffing issues in the southeast area of the state and is having recruitment events to get more qualified staff.

OVR received 2 federal rehabilitation services disability innovation fund grants. The first is a 5-year grant for fourteen million for sub minimum wage to competitive

integrated employment. The second is called Pathways to Partnership. It is a collaboration between OVR and Bureau of Special Education to expand transition services for youth with disabilities throughout PA.

Work programs are expanding this summer. OVR expects about a thousand students this year, up from about 850 last summer. One program is a partnership with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources with their outdoor corps program. That program has an ASL cohort as well. OVR is actively recruiting summer internship settings in which OVR works with other state agencies to take college students with disabilities as interns.

Since July 1, 2022, household income requirements have been temporarily lifted from 300% of the federal poverty guidelines for individuals plus a set amount per dependent to \$100,000 plus a small amount per dependent. Certain limitations on financial assistance for post-secondary training have been lifted. Based on the amount of funding expected to be carried over to Federal Fiscal Year 2024, the State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation has approved another temporary extension of the above through June 30, 2024, or earlier, based on the discretion of the OVR Executive Director.

Preliminary planning is currently happening for the 2024 DHH Summer Academy. More information about the 2024 program will be disseminated to the public once the location and dates have been finalized between OVR and the program host location. OVR is also continuing to advocate for increased accessibility of all CareerLink sites for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind consumers.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Public Comment Period:**

#### **Old Business:**

ACDHH Member Recruitment –

There are 5 -6 member vacancies on the council. Ideas to fill the positions will be discussed at the next meeting. The composition of the public portion of the council needs to be at least 51% deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind.

ACDHH Code of Conduct Update –

Deb Swartz, council for ODHH, spoke about the code of conduct draft. It seems to be consistent with the Sunshine Act. Any consequences can be done at the discretion of the council chair. The code of conduct can be used but needs to be consistently enforced.

#### **New Business:**

2024 Goals –

A few goals were brought forward by council members. One was to advocate for budget increase for ODHH. This was determined to have to be for the 2025 budget

year since the 2024 budget timeline is finished. ODHH will make a presentation about their needs.

2024 Meeting Dates –

Meeting dates for the 2024 year will be 3/22/24, 6/14/24, 9/13/24 and 12/6/24.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Public Comment Period:**

Megan – First item is that court mandated classes for D&A are not accessible for deaf and hard of hearing because they are in English and don't provide interpreting services. Second item is that ODHH should provide training for more deaf interpreters.

**Other:**

Many council members made a motion to close the meeting and motion was seconded by all.

Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is on March 22, 2024.

Pennsylvania's Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) was established because of Act 1997-37, which required the establishment of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Advisory Council. The Council is mandated to provide recommendations to public and private agencies, advocate for services and act as a bureau of information.