

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING  
QUARTERLY MEETING: September 16, 2022  
Hybrid Meeting

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Members Present: Michelle Paonessa (Chair), Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Janette Fulton, Melissa Hutzler, Lori Leiman, Kallie Mendenhall, Lee Sheffield

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director)

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley – Sassaman

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

**Review and Approval of Minutes:**

The June 10, 2022 meeting minutes were reviewed. Russ Goddard made a motion to pass with no corrections. Lori seconded. Minutes were approved.

**Old Business:**

No old business. Survey will continue to be worked on during the executive session after the meeting.

**New Business:**

Discussion about moving to in-person meetings versus hybrid for the 2023 meeting dates. Michelle feels face-to-face meetings are more productive. Precautions can be set up for people worried about COVID. A few council members expressed agreement with switching council to in-person but perhaps allowing public to be virtual. The discussion will continue in December once dates are voted on for 2023. Janette will send out a poll to gauge council member availability to begin the process of setting up the meeting dates.

**Department Reports:**

Aging –

No report

Education –

PDE is continuing with the Attract, Prepare and Retain initiative. As part of the Retain portion, networking and learning communities were announced. They are designed for special education personnel to collaborate and grow professionally and serve as a venue to share effective practices, engage in problem-solving and learn from one another. Information is on the APR Repository.

A few special education forms have recently been updated. One of direct importance to ACDHH is the communication plan. The communication plan in the Individualized Education Plan for deaf and hard of hearing students was revised. Many stakeholders worked on this plan to update it. The new plan will be released in the next few weeks with implementation next school year.

The Bureau of Special Education, along with PaTTAN, puts out a monthly BSE Bulletin with updates for school staff, parents, and students. Anyone interested in signing up to receive this update can go onto the PaTTAN website to do so.

#### Health –

No report

#### Human Services –

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

- September Celebrates World Day of the Deaf! ODP, in collaboration with ODHH, created a video that explains World Day of the Deaf and the importance of communication and understanding, as well as equal rights for those who are Deaf. The video will be aired on Berk County TV.
- Our annual publication, a guide to offer resources in one central location for those who support or care for someone who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind and receives supports from ODP, was released.
- Positive Approaches Journal, Volume 11, Issue 2; A Better Understanding of Mental Health to Improve Systems and Supports was issued.
- ODP was invited to attend the PA School for the Deaf's community day.

##### Office of Medical Assistance Programs

- HealthChoices Physical Health Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) offers Medical Assistance benefits - consumers were to select a new MCO by August 16th, if consumers did not make a selection, a new MCO was automatically chosen.

##### Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL)

- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has approved the Community HealthChoices (CHC) Waiver amendment that transfers oversight of Financial Management Services (self-directed services model) from an OLTL-held contract to a function of the Managed Care Organizations (MCO) - effective July 1, 2022

##### Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council

- Request for Application (RFA) book was published. It includes 15 separate grant opportunities. The deadline to submit applications for these grants is Wednesday, October 26, 2022. The Council is seeking nominations for Council members who are individuals with developmental disabilities, parents

of children with developmental disabilities, or family members of adults with developmental disabilities. You can nominate yourself or another person.

### Labor and Industry –

Plans have been started to make CareerLink more accessible. There are 64 sites around the state so this process will be on-going.

### OVR

- The 2022 DHH Summer Academy, our pre-employment transition services program for DHH high school students in PA, took place at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) in Johnstown from Sunday, July 17, 2022, to Friday, July 29, 2022. We had six DHH high school students during the program, and all six have graduated from the program. We are in the early planning stages for the 2023 DHH Summer Academy.
- 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.
- MyWorks expanded to 31 counties. There were many great projects that were completed this summer, such as a BMX bike track.
- OVR has 3 main priorities: staffing, finances, and customer engagement. OVR has around 150 vacancies across the state, mainly in the counselor area. There has been a change in the degree area requirement so that will hopefully make a difference in getting applicants. OVR didn't use all its federal funds and will be carrying over around \$100 million to spend on staffing and customers. A new rapid engagement intention was launched to try to get customer service as soon as possible within regulations. Referrals for OVR have been trending up since March. Each office has outreach plans.
- OVR participated in the PA Transition Conference in collaboration with the Bureau of Special Education and Office of Developmental Programs.
- October is National Disability Employment Month. Activities will be planned. Follow us on social media. We have a lot of work still to be done but a lot of positives as well.

### ODHH

- Currently, there are 728 state-registered interpreters and 42 provisional interpreters. New registration will be coming up soon.
- Wolf Administration officials from the Pennsylvania departments of Labor & Industry (L&I) and General Services (DGS) recognized the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters who frequently appeared alongside Governor Tom Wolf and other commonwealth leaders to ensure that deaf and hard-of-hearing Pennsylvanians had access to life-saving information at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In times of crisis, it is especially critical that we consider the needs of all people to access and understand important

information about their health and safety. Because of the ASL interpreters who served alongside commonwealth leaders in 2020, there was no time lost in delivering COVID-19 information to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in Pennsylvania. NAD Ranked PA in the top 10 for providing access During COVID.

- ODHH recently posted a position for a Representative in Central Office. This position was posted through August and at current time, HR is receiving applicants to determine who moves into the next steps. ODHH is very excited to have a third representative join the staff.
- ODHH recently participated in the Summer Academy program. Held at the HGAC, several students enjoyed hands on learning activities, STEM lessons, visiting local colleges and learning to advocate for themselves. We look to see these students change the world someday. We were thrilled when the Secretary was able to join in graduation and meet the students.
- A SSP training is being held this weekend. Many individuals are currently receiving SSP services.

### **Public Comment:**

Jessica Adams asked if students that are deaf/blind are also allowed to attend the Summer Academy? Melissa replied that they are. A second question was if there is a way to see the provisional interpreters like we can see the certified ones? Melissa replied no because it changes frequently but you can ask for names.

Karen Leslie Henry asked for the link for the video by ODP. The link was put in the chat area.

Igor Khmil mentioned how there is still not communication access, especially no legal interpreters, and interpreters for job interviews. Melissa said to contact her office and she'll look into it. Igor also said sometimes people have to wait 6 months for services but individuals who are not deaf get seen sooner. Ryan Hyde said he is not sure why that is happening. It could be because of staffing issues or because there are not enough interpreters, but he'll follow up with the Philadelphia office. Russ added that many sign language interpreters like to stay home and do remote work which may affect things as well.

Patrick Kilgallon volunteers to assist people who are deaf. He feels many nursing home residents are stuck in homes without communication access. There are social workers that help sometimes but people need interpretation in person. Patrick would like to know how to resolve. Lea put her email address in chat and said to contact her to discuss issues and solutions. Michelle thanked Lea for helping out since the designee from the Department of Aging is not at the meeting.

Deborah James discussed a friend not getting long-term living services because she is obese. Deborah does not feel it is right that people do not qualify because of weight. Melissa used to work with waivers and said to contact her to talk specifics rather than discuss on public forum.

**Potential Council Member Interview:**

Taiyabah Naeem was interviewed by Michelle and Russ for a council position. Taiyabah was asked a series of questions such as why she wanted to be on the council, what issues she feels is facing the community, advocacy achievements, etc.

The council went into an executive session to discuss the candidate. The council came back and voted for Taiyabah's name to be sent for appointment by the Governor.

**Other:**

Russ made a motion to close the meeting and motion was seconded.

Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is on December 9, 2022.

Pennsylvania's Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) was established as a result 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.