

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING  
QUARTERLY MEETING: December 3, 2021  
Virtual

Members Present: Michelle Paonessa (Chair), Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Kay Tyberg, Alex Van Hook, Lori Leiman, Janette Fulton, Trisha Mader, Kallie Mendenhall, Stacey Gustin, Amy Letteri, Deb Shostak

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director), DeeDee Keiser, Ben Moonan, Denise Brown

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley - Sassamon

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

**Review and Approval of Minutes:**

The September 24, 2021 meeting minutes were reviewed. Kay Tyberg asked for a few items to be reworded and spelling errors corrected. Lori Leiman also asked for the minutes to be corrected for similar reasons. Russ Goddard made a motion to pass with corrections. Janette Fulton seconded. Minutes were approved.

**Guest Speaker:**

Tara Kelly (PaTTAN) gave an overview of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Initiative. She highlighted the many trainings and resources offered such as PaTTAN Pods, the Family Resource Group, and Hour with the Expert. She discussed Educational Interpreter trainings. Tara also shared networking options such as DHH Professional Repository and Educational Audiology Roundtable. Tara communicated about family engagement, the student led IEP series, and committees. She finished by giving information about DHH year long projects such as a set of foundational videos and a google site with resources.

**Old Business:**

Russ Goddard brought up having a secretary on the council. Prior to the 2020 election, there was a secretary but now Melissa Hawkins has been taking the notes for the council. Russ feels now would be a good time to revisit having an elected secretary. Lori Leiman said she did it for one year and feels having a yearly rotation would be good since it is a lot of work. Janette Fulton agreed with Lori that rotating sounded like a good idea.

Melissa Hawkins said new elections are in March and a new secretary could be voted on at that time. Russ stated the bylaws indicate a secretary is to be elected once every two years. Janette volunteered to do the minutes for December as a temporary measure. Russ proposed the council approve Janette as temporary secretary for December and have the elections in March for a permanent secretary. Russ made a motion to pass, and Kay Tyberg seconded. Votes taken and motion passed.

### **Department Reports:**

#### Education –

Janette Fulton reported that Tara Kelley gave some great information out during her presentation.

The Pennsylvania Assessment Calendar dates were released for the spring. In an effort to support the mental and emotional well-being of students and educators, PDE is reiterating the availability of online resources on the PDE website. There is also a new transition website to assist students, parents, and school staff. The Bureau of Special Education will be hosting a conference March 2-4, 2022 called *Making a Difference* to highlight effective instructional strategies and interventions and provide an opportunity to learn and engage with others.

#### Health (Early Hearing Detection and Intervention)–

Stacy Gustin reported that the EHDI Program had carryover funds due to limitations of spending related to COVID. With these funds, the Program plans to purchase additional hearing screening equipment that will be supplied to midwives performing homebirths, provide education to Early Intervention providers, and host regional collaboratives that bring stakeholders to the table to improve hearing screening, diagnosis, and enrollment into Early Intervention and Family Connections for Language and Learning.

The audiologist subcommittee, a subset of the Infant Hearing Screening Advisory Board, is working on an audiologist education. The subcommittee is in the early stages of this development.

One of the funding requirements is to expand screening for those up to age three. EHDI have been working closely with Early Head Start; however, the pandemic has placed restrictions on additional projects for Head Start. They continue to be in conversation with Mary Ellen Mannix regarding a protentional collaboration. States have been given an extension to identify means to expand screening until the end of year three. Pennsylvania is

currently in year two. If anyone has any additional suggestions on how to expand screening, the program is open to suggestions.

There is CMV legislation that has been introduced that would require CMV testing if an infant referred on their inpatient hearing screening. There's been no recent movement of the bill.

The Program submitted a promising practice proposal to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is looking for innovative practices to improve early hearing detection and intervention. The EHDI proposal discussed that Early Intervention and Technical Assistance always makes every professional training they offer available to families in addition to the targeted professionals, so that families of deaf or heard of hearing children are offered a much broader slate of training opportunities to increase their knowledge base.

The 2019 EHDI report is with the Department's Communication's Office. It will be released and available on the EHDI website by the end of the year.

The annual Early Hearing and Detection and Intervention meeting will be next March. If anyone wants information, Stacy can certainly provide a link. Cincinnati, Ohio is the probable location.

#### Labor and Industry –

Russ Goddard reported that OVR is continuing to provide VR, IL, and specialized services for all disabilities in a hybrid environment. OVR has completed the implementation of a part-time telework program for eligible and suitable staff.

The order of selection waiting list ended on July 1, 2021. Customers who have been determined by OVR staff to be eligible for services and those with multiple disabilities are now being served first without waiting for services.

He also reported that the 2022 DHH Summer Academy is happening. The program for DHH high school students in PA will take place at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) in Johnstown from Sunday, July 17, 2022 to Friday, July 29, 2022. More information will be released toward the end of December 2021.

#### ODHH –

Melissa Hawkins reported that all staff are in telecommute status. Staff splits time in the home office and the regular office. ODHH is also easing back into the field as well.

Currently, there are 667 state-registered interpreters and 45 provisional interpreters. ODHH will be collaborating with the Department of Treasury on training for call centers and handling calls from relay callers. ODHH has received many complaints of call centers hanging up on or not understanding the operator. ODHH continues to work on assistance with housing and other ongoing advocacy issues. The office is receiving more calls to assist transitions from hospital to homes or centers that can support individuals who are deaf. As always, should you need assistance with UC or anything else, please don't hesitate to contact ODHH.

ODHH is planning the 2022 Hearing Loss Expo. The plan is to host this in Harrisburg over three days. ODHH looks to partner with PARID, DeafStone and other community partners to offer trainings for SSP's, Interpreters and other workshops. ODHH is excited to bring this Expo back.

ODHH is pleased to announce that DeafStone was awarded the contract to provide SSP Services to the Western side of the State. This contract begins on December 1st. We recognize this was a long time coming and we appreciate the patience and cooperation with everyone involved. We look forward to building up this program with partnership of DeafStone. The proposal request for the Eastern side of the state has closed, and we will provide updates as we are able.

### **Nomination of New Council Member:**

The council interviewed Melissa Hutzel. She is currently a speech and language pathologist working in Early Intervention. Melissa completes independent evaluations in various counties and provides families with information and support for hearing screenings and assessments. Melissa works with children who are currently diagnosed and helps direct them to services and community resources.

Personally, Melissa started to experience hearing loss when she was 30 years old. She stated that she worried she was losing a part of herself but then realized she was just discovering who she really is. Melissa said she is still on the journey of discovery but embraces her hearing loss and proudly wears her hearing aids for all to see. She also shares her story with people she meets in the hope that others will benefit from her experiences.

During her 24-year career, Melissa has been fortunate to work with a diverse population and with children and adults who are deafblind and hard of hearing. She profoundly believes who she is today makes her a better person and therapist and that is why she would like to be on the council.

The council asked Melissa 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 Melissa's name to be sent for appointment by the Governor.

### **Public Comment:**

Heather Schonfield – Heather expressed that she does not feel the communication with ODHH is good. She also stated that she would like to see a deafblind person on the council to make it balanced. Heather stated she is thankful that Deafstone is running the SSP but does not feel there has been much progress. She finished by saying she would like ODHH to listen to people and to have more respect for the deafblind community.

Jessica Adams – Jessica introduced herself as the COO of Deafstone, who was just awarded the SSP contract for the Western half of Pennsylvania. This contract started December 1, 2021. They have had an emergency contract since January and a lot has happened since then but are hoping for more improvements with the official contract. Deafstone is planning on hiring staff that will be completely focused and dedicated to the program. There is a SSP training scheduled for February. The December training was canceled due to lack of registration.

Jerry Penna – Jerry stated that it took PSAD 12 years to get the ODHH office established. It was 12 years of advocacy work to get it set up and has been operating with a budget of \$500,000 a year for years. Jerry declared he believes the advisory council needs to start advocating on behalf of the office to increase funding to a proper level. He also feels there needs to be more staff to handle the workload. Jerry retired from the office six years ago but the position he left is still vacant. He stated the council needs to advocate to the Governor's Office and the Secretary of Labor and Industry for proper funding because he fears if it doesn't increase, there won't be a ODHH office in ten years. He finished his comments by saying he feels there needs to be a deafblind person on the council. People are trying to communicate with OVR and ODHH and are not feeling productive but there is serious work to be done.

### **Other:**

The council voted on meeting dates for 2022. Those dates will be counted and emailed out.

Janette Fulton made a motion to close the meeting. Russ Goddard seconded.  
Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is in March – date to be determined after calendar votes are tallied.