

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING  
QUARTERLY MEETING: December 9, 2022  
Hybrid Meeting

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Members Present: Michelle Paonessa (Chair), Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Janette Fulton, Melissa Hutzell, Lori Leiman, Kallie Mendenhall, Lee Sheffield, Amy Letteri, Debi Shostak, Mark Beall

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director)

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley – Sassaman

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

**Review and Approval of Minutes:**

The September 16, 2022 meeting minutes were reviewed. Russ Goddard made a motion to pass with no corrections. Melissa seconded. Minutes were approved.

**Department Reports:**

Aging –

No report

Education –

Family Resource Group

All families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), blind or visually impaired (BVI), or deaf-blind (DB) are invited to sign up for the PaTTAN Family Resource Group. The Family Resource Group is a way for us to send up-to-date resources, opportunities, and connections directly to your family. It helps you and your child have more access to what you need for success in school and beyond. It will keep your family more informed about the special education process and about available supports across Pennsylvania.

Revised Communication Plan released October 2022

The Communication Plan for a Child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing is a description of the type(s) of communication support a student who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind will receive to support reading, communication, and the access to and use of assistive technologies. The communication plan is mandated by IDEA and implements Pennsylvania's Chapter 14 Regulations as a required component of the IEP for any student with a hearing loss who is receiving a service, support, or activity from an audiologist and/or teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing.

PaTTAN has the plan and the annotated version on their website for reference. It is recommended to be started this year with the requirement of all schools to be using in the 22-23SY.

#### ERCHL

Educational Resources for Children with Hearing Loss (ERCHL) is an advisory committee to the Bureau of Special Education (BSE) and its mission is to promote excellence in the provision of educational programs and services for all Pennsylvania students who are deaf or hard of hearing. ERCHL has partnered with PaTTAN to develop brief informational videos to support educators and families.

#### State Assessments

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) released results from the 2021-2022 school year administration of state-level assessments: the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA), and Keystone Exams on 11/28/22.

#### New Educator Competencies

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) announced in October that it has developed new educator competencies to increase literacy. The competencies identify the knowledge and skills educators need to effectively teach reading based on current research. PDE will provide structured literacy supports along with professional development and training to educators who hold instructional certificates in early childhood education, elementary-middle level, PK-12 Special Education, English as a Second Language, and Reading Specialist. Structured literacy focuses on five essential components of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Educator preparation programs must integrate the structured literacy competencies and standards for the five specified certification programs no later than August 1, 2024. Also, the continuing professional development plans of each school entity must include training in structured literacy competencies and standards for the five specified certification programs.

#### Library Cards

The PA Department of Education (PDE) encourages Pennsylvanians to sign up for a library card. Signing up for a library card is a step on the path to academic achievement and lifelong learning. All year long, you can find a public library service location near you using the Office of Commonwealth Libraries' library directory. Many libraries offer the ability to get a library card online, or you can visit the location in person to sign up.

## Reminder of BSE Bulletin

BSE Bulletin: <https://www.pattan.net/Publications/BSE-Bulletin>

### Health –

The most notable update is that over the summer the Senate passed, and Governor Wolf signed into law Pennsylvania Act 29 of 2022, which is a targeted CMV virus screening act. Every baby is screened for hearing loss. Hearing loss is one of the primary indicators of congenital CMV. We are now able to ensure that all babies who don't pass their hearing screening are referred immediately for a CMV screen. That's significant because the existing best practices for CMV treatment require the treatment to begin before 21 days of life. The act came for a couple of requirements. On the screening side, the requirements are that CMV education is offered to all expecting parents and that the CMV screen is conducted after a failed hearing screen. On the Department side, the requirements is to provide certain information for guardians and screening partners. The Department of Health has made an entire CMV portal within the newborn screening website for parents and screening partners to find resources. We have also started a subcommittee within our own advisory council to target CMV education and to update existing documentation. The other primary requirement is that hospitals and midwives need to report to Department of Health regarding their CMV screening efforts. We're leveraging the newborn hearing screening infrastructure to collect results of CMV screens as well. As of October, we had the first round of reporting results coming into the state.

### Human Services –

#### Office of Developmental Programs (ODP)

- Pennsylvania is one of 14 states to receive grant awards from the federal Department of Education for the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE). The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) will use the funding to develop a five-year plan to support Pennsylvanians with disabilities in transitioning out of subminimum-wage employment.

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

- Amendment and public comments: Community HealthChoices (CHC) Waiver to add Agency with Choice as a Financial Management Services model for the participant-directed services of Personal Assistance Services and Respite, modify Service Coordinator and Service Coordinator Supervisor qualifications to align with the CHC Agreement, and amend the service definitions for Benefits Counseling, Nursing Services, Physical Therapy Services, Occupational Therapy Services and Speech and Language Therapy Services.

- Amendment and public comments: OBRA Waiver to add Agency with Choice as a Financial Management Services model for the participant-directed services of Personal Assistance Services and Respite, revise the Benefits Counseling service definition, amend the responsibilities of the Fiscal/Employer Agent, and update the Quality Improvement Strategy to the current process.

DHS New State Child Care Tax Credit: A program which can help ease child care costs for working families. This credit can be claimed when filing state taxes beginning in 2023. The credit is also refundable, and qualified taxpayers will not owe any state taxes on the amount they receive.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): A federally funded program administered by DHS that provides assistance for 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, 2022, to April 28, 2023.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Effective October 1, Pennsylvania will increase the income threshold for all applicants.

PA Developmental Disabilities Council: Announces the Golden Opportunity Grants Program. The program offers small grants of up to \$5,000 for up to 6 months for unexpected events or situations that lead to an idea for work to respond to the unforeseeable situation in the future.

### Labor and Industry –

The 2023 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Summer Academy is happening. It will be back at Penn State again, which is an ideal environment for our participants to be able to experience life on a college campus. For the 2023 program, the only major change is switching from 12 days to 10 days. It will be from July 16 – July 26. Applications are open now. We have it posted on social media and emails went out to all OVR to spread the word.

DHS mentioned the sub minimum wage to competitive integrative employment grant. We are actively very busy on getting that project up and running. It is a five-year, 14 million grant from the disability innovation fund. The intention of that grant is to get people out of sub minimum wage or to help people who were considering sub minimum wage to choose competitive integrative employment. We're going to be using the charting the life course framework, which is a nationally recognized program. We are looking to partner with employers in green manufacturing and distribution facilities. The first year is really an administrative year trying to get things set up. We have a lot of agreements and statements of work to write. It will focus on an employer in Philly area and then one in a rural area. For an additional four years after that, we'll be looking for two sites per year to

stand up and build all of these supports around individuals who may be considering sub minimum wage or individuals currently in it. Pennsylvania still allows sub minimum wage. This grant is not intended to end sub minimum wage. It's just to give another option for people to explore competitive integrative employment. That's what OVR focuses on. We want to focus on competitive integrative employment and that was the intent of the grant.

I recently attended the council of state vocational administrators conference in Texas. This is our national conference where all the OVR executive directors get together and hear from RSA about the state of the national VR program. And there's definitely some concerns on the national level. The pandemic really impacted the VR program nationally. RSA has really challenged us to do more and do it quickly because we have as a national program in the last seven years returned about a billion dollars. That's not Pennsylvania, that's nationally. Congress is starting to ask questions about the program. We have been really trying to step up, invest more funds in our program, invest more funds in our customers. This past fall, we spent over 11 million just in training and post-secondary education reimbursement tuition for about 2,000-plus customers. And since July, we have spent 29.5 million on services So we're starting to see some of our spending return to pre-pandemic levels. But we are still down customers. And we are still down staff. But we are trending in the right direction for both referrals and spending.

In July, we did implement a rapid engagement process within OVR. Rapid engagement is intended to move customers along as quickly as possible. That has been a historic problem in OVR. We have a documentation requirement process. There are meetings and eligibility determinations. We had training for staff in July and updated the system in October to track some of that stuff better and allow things to progress more quickly. We want to see customers move through as quickly as possible.

The order of selection is open to all three categories. Someone who might not have been eligible or met the order of selection criteria in the past probably would be at this point. We also have upped the amount to 100,000 for the financial need. If a person is making less than 100,000, they will probably not have to contribute toward services.

Our My Work program is our summer work-based learning program. We had around 30 different sites going this past summer where we were having kids out doing beautifying projects and clerical with local municipalities. We're looking to expand that for 2023. We're also exploring a summer program with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. They have a summer works program called the PA Outdoor.

ODHH

It is interpreter registration months. That means many interpreter registrations coming in and we are handling this as fast as we can. If you have concerns with

registration or if you are dealing with an issue, please don't hesitate to contact one of us, and we will answer your concerns as soon as possible.

We moved into a new building. There's a new mailing address. And we have a new technology team.

We are planning our 2023 expo that will likely be back here where we are at the Penn Harris hotel, the former Radisson. We're excited to start planning that. We welcome all vendors to return. Workshops and everything else we were known for putting the Expos on. Please watch for more information to come out, whether through Facebook, social media, or the website.

We had to cancel the SPP training this weekend due to unexpected people dropping out. This came on the heels of our September training where we had great success with 12 people graduating and going out on the eastern side of the state. We will look to reschedule the training and move forward to making sure we have more SSPs.

We are going to be out in the community more in 2023. We realize that COVID had us more in a virtual world. With our communities who are deaf and hard of hearing and deafblind and need the visual aspect of assisting them through advocacy and anything else, we will be out more visible.

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

Igor asked when babies are born and you do the newborn hearing screening and you find out that the person has a hearing loss, is there a representative who is deaf who can talk to the parents to explain to them about American Sign Language and what is possible as a deaf person?

Mark responded that they fund a family support group called Family Connections for Language and Learning. They refer every family who has a newborn with hearing loss to that program. It's a 100% referral rate. We have about 80% enrollment rate. So, a good number of families do take advantage of that program. Within that program, we offer two key resources. Primarily, what they call a guide or a mentor, which is a parent who has been through the process themselves or a deaf adult whose job is to connect with each of those families and do exactly what you described. Family connections for language and learning is method agnostic, which is to say they're specifically not supposed to encourage or support one method above the other.

### **Old Business:**

Dates for 2023 Meetings will be March 24<sup>th</sup>, June 16<sup>th</sup>, September 15<sup>th</sup>, and December 1st.

The question came up on whether to do hybrid or in-person. Members said they like the hybrid option for the convenience of the participants and as a way to expand our reach in the community.

Content of ACDHH Community Needs Survey is almost complete.

### **New Business:**

Dissemination of ACDHH Community Needs Survey will be completed by ODHH since they provide administrative support for the council. ODHH will have Commonwealth media services help with the videos and make sure there is an interpreter with captioning and scripts to make sure it is fully accessible. We are hoping to get it done within the next month or so. We will also get it on paper and email. Results will come to the ODHH address and we will send them to the attention of the advisory council. Russ made a motion to approve moving forward with the survey and Mark seconded.

Recruitment of new council members was discussed. The hearing loss expo, including information in the survey, include it in the various publications, conferences and workshops council members are a part of were discussed as options. Melissa reminded members of the process of becoming a new council member.

Michelle brought up the overall definition of the council. She recommended the council come up with a mission statement to tell everyone what the council is and what we do. Russ mentioned the mission to be advocating for the betterment of deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind Pennsylvanians in all aspects of public and private agencies, to inform the public about deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind services and to be a source of information for those who need information on this population. The council members agreed to discuss this more.

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

Igor brought up communication access, specifically related to interpreters. For an example, he discussed doctor offices and driving license centers.

### **Other:**

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

Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is on March 24, 2023.

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.