**Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind Advisory Council**

**July 16, 2020**

**Zoom Video Conference**

**9:30-11:00**

**ATTENDEES**

**Board Members:** Spenser Weppler, Charlea Deb Baker, Monica Hutt, Bill Hudson, Amelia Briggs, Laura Siegel, Katy Langevin, Morgan Tewksbury, Sherry Sousa, AJ Van Tassel, Rebecca Chalmers, Linda Hazard, Sharon Henry, Susan Kimmerly, Amy Williamson, Will Pendlebury

**Guests:**  Liz Perreault

**Interpreters:** Elizabeth Fox, Kristal Hier, White Coat Captioning

**Accomplishments**

**Spencer Weppler, Council Chair**

* Deaf/Hard of Hearing Driver Visor Cards – Visor cards are used to help those who are deaf or hard of hearing when pulled over while driving. Created in collaboration with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living (DAIL), the Vermont State Police (VSP), and this council. These cards will be widely distributed to the public.

A concern was raised that the DMV was keeping a list of those who requested the cards, and this is not accurate information. The DMV will ask for a name and address so they can mail the requested cards. The DMV should not be requiring people to declare whether or not they are deaf.

* WCAX Expose on Interpreting (Governor Press Conferences) – On July 3, 2020, WCAX aired a story on interpreting. It went over the process when signing for the Governor’s press conferences. The story discussed how to access interpreting services and the importance of having them available.

**Updates**

**Monica Hutt, DAIL Commissioner; Spenser Weppler, Council Chair; and Will Pendlebury, Council Member**

* D/HH/DB Coordinator Position Hiring Update – Monica Hutt reported that there was nothing new to update since the last meeting. This position will remain with the department but the ability to fill it may be at risk until sometime in the future based on the fiscal stress the state is experiencing due to the pandemic.
* New England States and FEMA Updates – Spenser Weppler reported that states acquiring masks with a clear front for better communication is a high priority. Currently this style of mask is hard to find and medical professionals are being equipped with them first. Having this style mask more readily available is critical especially with schools opening back up in the fall. Not being able to see a teacher’s face affects all students. Not being able to see the teacher’s facial cues effects auditory understanding and language development. The Agency of Education (AOE) does have guidance for schools available. [AOE School Opening Guidance](https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-vdh-guidance-strong-healthy-start-school-health-rev-20200617.pdf)
* VCIL Update – Will Pendlebury, who is a member of the VCIL board, reported that VCIL has received money from the Federal Government through the CARES Act. This money will be used to provide more Meals on Wheels to people and some of the money will go to the Vermont Interpreter Referral Service (VIRS) to help businesses who are struggling financially due to COVID19 to still access interpreter services for a limited time.

VIRS has an advisory council and they are working to better integrate into the community and maintain better lines of communication.

**Vermont Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (VTEHDI) Program Update**

**Linda Hazard**

VTEHDI received the 4-year, $160,000 per year, grant from the Center for Disease (CDC). It was very competitive with applicants from 50 states and 9 territories applying and only 39 grants awarded. This money will help with developing and supporting a database that is used to track kindergarten readiness and educational outcomes.

While audiologists’ offices were closed during the pandemic, primary physicians filled in the gap and conducted screenings for babies. Currently, there is only one family still waiting for a screening. VTEHDI continues to partner with primary care physicians and midwives.

**Nine East Networks Update**

**Linda Hazard**

Nine East Networks applied and was awarded the AOE grant that supports deaf and hard of hearing services for students aged 3 – graduation from high school. Nine East Networks has hired additional teachers of the deaf to support the program this year.

Nine East has been working on adjusting their billing to better reflect the preparation, research, and documentation on students in addition to the instruction time. Currently, one service hour is equivalent to 2.5 to 3.5 hours of actual time.

The PIP Program is still struggling financially, and Nine East is looking at using the Capacity Grant from the state and increasing Medicaid funding. The Medicaid reimbursement rate went from $100 to $70, which is a $30 decrease per service hour. EDHI is continuing to fund part of the program with a grant.

Staff is preparing to return to work after summer break. It will be difficult to know what to expect when each school district will be doing something different. There should be better information to share at the September meeting.

**COVID19 Updates:**

**Deaf COVID19 Testing Sites**

**Bill Hudson**

Initially there was not much access to information about the pandemic for the deaf community who use ASL. That made a scary time that much more frightening for people.

The Vermont Association of the Deaf and the Vermont Department of Health immediately teamed up and started the planning on how to accommodate people who are hard of hearing or deaf. Currently, there is a schedule of statewide COVID-19 testing sites that will have ASL interpreters availble so people can go and get their testing with full communication access. The Vermont Association of the Deaf will host a VLOG for the community to go over what the testing is like and what to expect.

**Emergency Preparedness Discussions with the Health Department**

**Bill Hudson**

Now that collaboration has begun and some systems are in place to handle emergencies, there is momentum to continue the discussion and create a state plan that accounts for the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing community. Bill, Will and people from the Department of Health will work together to put a written plan together.

**VPQHC Telehealth Work Group**

**Spenser Weppler**

The Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care (VPQHC) has been hosting weekly “office hours” primarily focused on telehealth. Recently, there was one meeting focused on how providers and audiologists could work with the deaf and hard of hearing over remote platforms. The participants in this meeting were representatives from the State Primary Care Association, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont, and the chief medical officer from Medicaid. Spenser took the opportunity during this meeting to ask if Medicare would pay for telehealth for audiologist services. Both Blue Cross and Blue Shield and Medicaid representatives confirmed that they do cover audiology telehealth visits.

**Vermont Assistive Technology (AT) Program**

**Caelan Manning**

Caelan Manning came to the council to introduce himself as a new staff member with AT which serves the general public and VocRehab clients. AT is defined as anything that can support a person with a disability in bringing them up to the same functional level as their nondisabled peers. Caelan specifically works with individuals across five VocRehab offices and covers the eastern corridor of Vermont. He meets with clients who have disabilities and matches them with technology that can help them at school and at work. The age of his clients ranges from 16 and older.

Caelan’s background is working with deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind individuals. He initially went to school to become an interpreter. However, because of Asperger’s, he struggled with understanding speaking people because of the ambiguous language that is typically used.

Some trends Caelan has observed during the pandemic is that video meetings are not usually accessible. Connectivity across the state is spotty and a lack of safety equipment like strobe fire alarms or flashing doorbells in home offices can be problematic for those who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind.

For more information on the AT Program you can go to: [AT Program Website](https://dail.vermont.gov/divisions/atp)

**Legislative Update**

**Spenser Weppler, Council Chair and William Pendlebury, Council Member**

**H.650 (HLAA VT Seat) –** This bill was signed by the Governor and gives an additional seat to the Council which will be filled by a HLAA representative.

Council members are asked to solicit nominations. The timeline will be to gather nominations and applications between now and the September meeting to then vote for the preferred applicant. The council’s preference and recommendation and the names of all applicants will then be forwarded for Governor’s appointment.

**Legislative Report 2021 Preparation –** The council will need to start preparing the 2021 Legislative Report that is due in January. There is some time to work on it but it’s important for it to be on people’s radar. There is a lot of information to include in the repot between accomplishments and what has been learned going through the pandemic.

**Other**

Deb Baker – HLAA continues to operate as a remote chapter and the in person national convention was cancelled but held remotely. It wasn’t the same as in person, but the turnout was good and the information that was shared about the latest research in hearing loss was good.

The Boston chapter has been holding Zoom meetings too and they are going to offer a New England conference in September. Having the conventions remotely has opened it up to more people who aren’t as comfortable in large in person, group settings.

**In closing-**

Will and Spenser will send another Survey Monkey to get the council’s feedback on how this meeting was for them.

If anyone has suggestions on guest speakers, they would like invited to a council meeting please let Spenser or Will know.

September’s agenda will probably include the return to school and the vote for the council seat nomination to the Governor.

**Meeting was adjourned**