

# Vermont Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing/DeafBlind Council Meeting Notes

July 13, 2023  
9:30am-12:00am  
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

## Welcome/Housekeeping/Announcements

A small group today, we don't have any decisions to make so quorum is not required. Discussion of the flash flood was discussed by members and that will be discussed later regarding the crisis in Vermont and administration's lack of forethought in terms of getting emergency information out to people who speak different languages.

- There will not be an update from Linda on EHDI, she'll send a report from EHDI and the school-based services from the medical center partnership with CDCI.
- AOE has awarded the grant for the upcoming state calendar year starting July 1. The grant was awarded to CDCI CARES. If people have questions about that, they can feel free to contact [Laura Greenwood](#) at the AOE directly.

## Program/Organizational updates

*Val Hughes- VCIL- Deaf Independence Coordinator at Vermont Center for independent Living*

Our office in Montpelier flooded, we're working remotely. Sarah is working with FEMA. We're frustrated with the Governor's press conference with no access for ASL or captioning or any other language, resources to find information/updates. Housing crisis is still a huge issue for clients who were relocated from hotels, who are now camping, are on the streets, and couch surfing.

*Deb Charlea Baker – VT HLA*

We are actually taking the summer off for meetings. But since our last council meeting, we did have that our chapter meeting on May 30th, with a presentation from Michelle Vicino, the associate accessibility relationship manager at the Vermont Relay. We're still working on collecting accessible sites, municipalities are doing upgrades and FM loops are gradually being installed. Our steering committee, we have 7 members of folks at the hub. And we have, I believe, over 80 or 90 signed up members. And then, we have people who kind of come in and go away and that sort of thing. We're building a pretty good cohort. The Governor's press conference had no captioning! When I've contacted his office before, I get a run around. You know. And I don't know. Maybe the Council as a group, we can convince him that, actually, we're Vermonters, too, and we need access. Especially with emergency situations.

*Bradley Brown, Vice President for Vermont Association of the Deaf*

Bradley was filling in for David Krueger and acknowledge the flood and the lack of access for the Deaf and hard of hearing community! We need support from the Governor's office and maybe they need more education on this issue. VTAD board is focusing on hosting a town hall in different locations throughout the State of Vermont (Bennington, St. Johnsbury, St. Albans, Brattleboro, and Newport) to get a sense of what's going on in the community, the needs are. We will have elections and the changing of the board coming up in October 14th, and our meeting for that will be in Rutland. Quick follow up

about the Bill of Rights and making sure deaf/hard of hearing/deafblind education is being met. I'd like to know more about that when the time comes. I want to follow up about the AOE grant and making sure we get all of those details. Bradley will remain in with his position until the end of his term.

*Sharon Henry- Co-Chair of the School Age Subcommittee*

Last June, we submitted a draft of the Vermont Quality Indicator Tool for deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind services. We also submitted it to the Agency of Education for their feedback and requested to consider endorsing and using the tool to evaluate services that are provided by the state. February or early March the subcommittee received internal and external stakeholder feedback. In the meantime, we proceeded with beta testing it in two or three school districts that Linda and UVMCC educational services program was working with and received very positive feedback about the tool. We created a checklist that Special Ed directors found very helpful. We presented the checklist and the tool to the Vermont Superintendents Association on May 19th. In May and June, Tracy Hinck, an educational audiologist and member of the council had an opportunity to use the checklist with several of her teams and students and they found it helpful, as well. The Sub Committee met again, on July 10<sup>th</sup> where they reviewed, discussed, incorporated feedback that we had received from the AOE and feedback from our springtime experiences. We scheduled a meeting for tomorrow for downtown Montpelier at the Capital Plaza, and we're rescheduling Nov 6, 12:30 – 3:30 for the Capitol Plaza, Montpelier due to the flooding. The keynote speaker was going to be Cheryl DeConde Johnson who is supportive of what we're doing. We're the only state in the country doing this type of assessment. I'd like to make a motion that the council fully endorse the tool and, Spenser, I'll defer to you whether you want to do it by vote, or not. And then, secondly, have a discussion about sending a letter to the Governor and AOE within the next month. Spenser states: The Vermont Quality Indicator Tool for deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind services documentation will be emailed to Council members refer questions to Sharon and Sherry. Council will do an email vote. Sharon and Sherry will draft letters to Secretary of AOE and Governor for Council stating that the council officially endorse (assuming affirmative vote) and that they are asking for support in it's use.

### **D/HH/DB Director's Report**

*D/HH/DB Director Update – Laura Siegel*

Over the last week I have collaborated with many different organizations who are out there, TV channels and different state emergency systems all over Vermont, Vermont Broadcaster Association trying to make sure that accessibility is for everyone all over. Moving forward, we will be able to come up with a very specific plan to make sure that this will not happen, again, in the future for emergency announcements. I am the point person to make that communication happen, to make sure things are set up. Other items I have been involved with AOE with that grant, involved with different divisions of the blind and sent an application called Pathways to Partnership, P2P is part of a different community partners and to be able to help students in their transition within school and after they graduate. So the idea is for mentorship programs to be established for our youth in the state and to be able to serve them and to also to work with Liz Hazard and Cory Bruner. 30 States are applying for this one year planning for 5 years of operations for \$7 million. Also working on providing technical assistance for the Department of Labor to focus on applications. I've been involved with an RFP to study how we can improve the better options for individuals who are developmentally disabled. Brian Guy and I have been writing a proposal to get 3 conference rooms set up all over the state that will include (inaudible) system

for folks who would like to be connected to a hearing loop system. 5 or 6 other presentations that are scheduled in the upcoming year, pertaining to education and whatnot. From January to now, I received 91 referrals.

### **VANCRO Presentation – Cory Brunner**

Cory provided an update on the past few days with regards to interpreting services and the flooding. VANCRO did not receive an interpreter request Monday July 10. There was a request for Tuesday. As you all know, there are 3 deaf interpreters who are available to do this work. Hearing interpreters should not be the front facing interpreters on screen. All three of those interpreters were either trapped at their homes, were out of state, or were confirmed for other work. We informed the governor's office that we had, because VANCRO was a national company several deaf interpreters available out of state to do this work if they were willing to do remote. We were told by the Governor's office that FEMA was bringing their own interpreter. We went ahead and canceled half of the team. 11:30 at night I received a call from FEMA requesting interpreting services, told FEMA we could provide remote interpreters. FEMA agreed. So, we provided four interpreters remotely, we did do a tech test with the screen, it seems like on Facebook live it was really, really good. But on the actual WCAX, there was some problems with the captioning covering. There's a finite number of interpreters in the State of Vermont. There's an interpreter shortage nationally. You need to let us know as soon as possible what your needs are so that we can secure interpreters. We cannot book interpreters without a formal request. If there's a way to navigate the remote system with the picture in picture, it is best practice, send us a Zoom link and work the technology on their end. It is literally that easy. Who VANCRO is. VANCRO is what's called a service disabled Veteran owned small business which is ran its run exclusively by deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind and hearing interpreters. We like to honor our three key stakeholders. For us, those groups are deaf people and hard of hearing people and deafblind who use sign language interpreters. We offer free workshops; we offer 20 hours a year of free interpreting training workshops for them. We are starting an interpreter apprentice program in the State of Vermont. We also help advocate to get prep material and teams when needed and deaf interpreters when needed. We honor autonomous rates. Interpreters are able to charge what is standard practice in the given area. We work very hard to respond within 2 hours to any request. State of Vermont, we have over 400 requesters, this includes community interpreters and community requesters and State of Vermont requesters. Trainings to the general population about the work that we do, we provided in the last year 30 trainings and have reached 700 people. We were just awarded a grant through the Department of Labor to recruit and train 3 in person interpreters in the State of Vermont. Last year we did a needs assessment and found there was a need for more deafblind interpreters who knew how to do tactile interpretation and we applied for a grant and awarded a grant and able to train 10 interpreters to be better and more skilled at deafblind interpreting services. VANCRO provides media services. A document that they would like rendered into American Sign Language or an announcement that they would like rendered into American Sign Language and we put it in American Sign Language, provide voiceover, captioning and transcript for them to be able to use in their media. We provide SSP services, November of 2022 we were awarded a two year pilot grant to provide support service providers. SSP is somebody that can guide, can give environmental information, can come to your home and read your mail with you. Can take you grocery shopping and describe visually the grocery store so you can pick out your own groceries, can go to the gym with you and describe the gym and equipment and get it started for you so

you can work out. We currently have 25 SSPs and 7 deafblind participants. Laura Siegel has been incredibly helpful in this effort.

### **Deaf, Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind Bill of Rights Discussion**

Spenser Wepler- Rebecca sent a couple of documents for the Council to review. The Sub-Committee with regards to the tool had opened an opportunity for the Bill of Rights. What we should be looking for and advocating for in this legislation. Making sure students who are D/HH/DB are getting, having access and different options to services. This is the beginning of the conversation, from a timeline perspective and background, the bill was drafted discussions have taken place and proposed edits have been made by stakeholders some of whom are on the council. Eventually, if general consensus is reached then that would be relayed to Senator Nader Hashim as support for that bill. That introduction can happen anytime. Usually, they start introducing bills November/December in the second year of the biennium, but even though they introduce it, they don't assign it into committee until the session starts in January. They would assign it to a committee likely go to the education committee. That's when the clock starts, and they likely would be calling on many of you as advocates and with different views and experiences to provide background and insight on this. We've just been told that our role is to make recommendations to the Governor's Office and the Legislature. We have no binding power. One question becomes is there a way that we can draft language in the bill that also makes it so the Council has a little more standing in terms of the recommendations they make and are actually being adhered to and listened to and being accepted.

Rebecca Lalanne provided background on the bill to this point in that we recognize in the State of Vermont, school systems in particular, they're not providing adequate access to education to D/HH/DB students over time. She connected with Senator Hashim, and he said, yes, let's do this and she sent him what other states have already passed for D/HH bill of rights, and he decided to use Maine's as a template for Vermont. He gave that to his Legislative and Legal team to look over and modify the language for Vermont. He sent me a draft that I shared with the Council, the ASL Vermonter's organization and community members for help to review and give feedback for the language of the draft. We offered our revisions, and that is where we're at right now. The Senator supports a petition would be helpful to see who in the State is on board with this. I did draft a petition, sent that out, a lot of people signed on for it. I also created a fact sheet about what the Bill of Rights is supposed to do and not supposed to do and sent that to you yesterday. I'll have a meeting with the Senator at the end of July to touch base and see where he's at with the draft and revisions that were most recently offered.

### **Vermont Hands and Voices**

Received a letter from Vermont Hands and Voices last week. Michelle John has been joining on behalf of Vermont Hands and Voices but she's not a council member. This would be a housekeeping item in terms of the legislative changing the Council Statute language to add a seat to add a representative from Vermont Hands and Voices to the Council. And then, it would be filled by whoever, the Board at Vermont Hands and Voices chooses to appoint to the Council. Spenser would add this has a recommendation in our Legislative Report. There was broad support to add this seat to the council.

Will and I are working through trying to bring the council current on the membership.

**Public Comment**

There was no Public Comment

**Other Business/Closing**

- Linda will send a report from EHDI and the school-based services from the medical center partnership with CDCI.
- Vermont Quality Indicator Tool for deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind services documentation will be emailed to Council members refer questions to Sharon and Sherry. They will draft letters to Secretary of AOE and Governor for Council to officially endorse.
- Review Bill of Rights draft can be shared at September meeting
- Adding Vermont Hands and Voices as a Council seat will be included Council’s report
- Next meeting - September 21, 2023, from 9:30am -12:00pm

**Council Attendance**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spenser Weppler (Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Julie Porter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Krueger (Brad Brown)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Will Pendlebury (Co-Chair)	<input type="checkbox"/> Kate Parrish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Lalanne
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Hudson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cassie Santo	<input type="checkbox"/> Tracy Hinck
<input type="checkbox"/> Ralph Gallo	<input type="checkbox"/> Megan Tierney-Ward	<input type="checkbox"/> Pam Hoover
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Chalmers	<input type="checkbox"/> Leslie Davis	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sharon Henry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Linda Hazard	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Amelia Briggs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deb Charlea Baker	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Kelley Decker	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sherry Sousa	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Guest Attendance**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Elizabeth Fox	Interpreter
Rachel Cahill	Interpreter
Michelle John	VT Hands & Voices
Diane Scott	Captioner
John Pirone	UVM
Sabine Perry	AOE
Val Hughes	VCIL
Laura Siegel	Director of D/HH/DB (DAIL)