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

**September 17, 2020**

**Zoom Video Conference**

**9:30-11:00**

**ATTENDEES**

**Board Members:** Spenser Weppler, Deb Charlea Baker, Monica Hutt, Amelia Briggs, Laura Siegel, Katy Langevin, AJ Van Tassel, Rebecca Chalmers, Linda Hazard, Susan Kimmerly, Will Pendlebury, Bill Hudson, Julie Stefanski, Ralph Gallo

**Guests:**  Liz Perreault, Margaret Overman, Kira McDonough

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

**Updates:**

**D/HH/DB Services Director Position Hiring Update- Commissioner Hutt**

The State is currently in a hiring freeze, however DAIL was given permission to proceed with filling the empty D/HH/DB Services Director Position. The posting will include the importance of bi-lingual fluency in ASL and English.

**VCIL and VIRS Update- Will Pendlebury**

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. The advisory board will be meeting more often to create a solid referral system.

Laura Siegel is now the Deaf Independence Program Coordinator for VCIL and is working out of the Montpelier office.

**HLAA Updates- Deb Charlea Baker**

After a summer hiatus, the steering committee recently met to discuss the a bill on Hearing Aid Insurance Coverage.

H.611 (The Older Vermonter’s Act), should pass during the legislative mini-session. HLAA has provided testimony on H.611 but did not see any language in the proposed bill that addressed hearing loss. Once this bill is passed there will be a survey that will go out to Vermonters and this topic will be included. Once all the information from the survey comes back there will be an opportunity to include data that speaks to people’s inability to self-identify as an individual with a hearing loss. It will be an opportunity to include other pertinent information.

Once the bill is passed the State Plan that will be developed and HLAA and other stakeholders will offer input such as the inclusion of geriatric doctors screening for hearing loss during a wellness check-up. The bill already acknowledges dental health and hearing health is just as important.

The Governor’s press conferences should include closed captioning, not just interpreters.

There is a lack of therapist for people with hearing loss. When mental health services are needed, it is difficult to find therapists who are knowledgeable of the struggles of being hearing impaired.

There is a newsletter that goes out regularly. Please let Deb know if you would like to be included in the mailing.

Telehealth is covered by Medicare, but audiologist is considered a supplier, so those visits are not covered. There is work happening to change that delineation.

**VT EHDI- Linda Hazard**

The CDC and Health Resources Services Administration Grants have helped us enhance our database system to make it possible to be paperless. There were also changes to the diagnostic fields. The database is housed at the Vermont Department of Health along with birth records, death records, immunizations, lead, developmental disabilities, and newborn screenings. This makes it a fully integrated database.

Between January 1st and June 30th, there were 16 infants referred for diagnostic testing. Ten infants have received findings of normal hearing at the end of their evaluations. One child had a conductive loss, two had permanent hearing loss, and three are still being processed.

The Care Project, which is an organization out of North Carolina, will be partnering with North Carolina EHDI, Tennessee EHDI, and Vermont EHDI for a virtual workshop for professionals on empathy. This is scheduled for November 20, 2020.

**Nine East Networks Update- Susan Kimmerly**

This is the start of a new school year. There was a full staff meeting on August 19 to discuss the upcoming year. There is a new rate structure for Pre-K through 12th grade that provides more clarity, consistency, and accountability.

Within the Agency, there are many infrastructure changes in the feral system. Supervision of staff and contract development systems are being refined.

There have been two departures and two new hires.

Birth to three – The workload and revenue have been affected by COVID19. There have been many missed visits but there is still the need to document these to close the loop with CIS.

There is a kindergarten readiness program for three and four-year-old children that provide a good profile for when they begin school.

There is a bilingual ASL program becoming available that can test ASL interpreting skills. This site will be made available to staff and others. Currently, there are 40 students who are receiving sign language instruction. Of the 40 students, 30 have developmental disabilities in addition to a hearing loss.

**Legislative Update- Commissioner Hutt, Spenser Weppler, Will Pendlebury**

The D/HH/DB Council Legislative Report is due on January 15, 2021. The goal is to have a draft prepared for the November meeting for the council to review together. Members of the council will be asked to work on the sections that relate to their population and programs. It is requested that council members also review last year’s report and give feedback on any other changes or additions that should be made for the upcoming report.

The bill that would require movie theaters to provide closed captioning does not look like it will gain any traction in the legislature. The general thought among legislators is that an outreach campaign directly to the theaters may work in lieu of a legislative mandate.

VCIL would like to prioritize moving the Hearing Aid bill for the upcoming legislative session. HLAA would like to join in on the work to move this bill forward. It was suggested to have the original bill looked at and make changes based on the legislator’s feedback when it was initially presented. One of the challenges is the cost associated with the bill and getting commercial insurance companies to commit. Medicaid does cover some of the cost of hearing aids, but private insurance currently does not. Vermont is currently the only New England state that does not have some sort of coverage for hearing aids.

Steps to getting the bill rewritten and presented in the new legislative session:

* Form a workgroup
* Ask Sam Liss to join the workgroup
* Solicit a legislator to sponsor the bill

**COVID19 Updates- All**

There are pop-up sites that change regularly. Here is a link to that information: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/testing/where-get-tested>

It isn’t clear which sites will have interpreters available. Bill Hudson will ask a staff member at Vermont Department of Health. It was asked that Bill also mention the use of a phone app that is good for Hard of Hearing individuals. Health care providers can use the phone app to effectively communicate with those who are hard of hearing.

**NASDSE- Linda Hazard**

Educational outcomes for students who are deaf and hard of hearing was the discussion at the meeting last month. The group looked at how to address the needs for those who are deaf and hard of hearing in Vermont. Katy Langevin, Hands and Voices, and EHDI were on the initial meeting and would like to have the council included in future meetings. The document for Educational Guidelines for Optimal Outcomes will be shared with the council by Linda. This will become a regular update at council meetings.

**HLAA VT Seat Nomination- Spenser Weppler**

This is an action item to nominate the HLAA VT Seat on the council.

* Rebecca Chalmers moved to nominate Deb Charlea Baker for the HLAA VT Seat
* AJ Van Tassel seconded the motion
* Discussion-
* Ralph Gallo moved to vote
* All in favor- unanimous
* Deb Charlea Baker is officially approved to fill the HLAA VT Seat

The seat Deb leaves vacant with this shift will be filled in the coming months.

**Additional Updates-**

Laura Siegel reported that the Division of Fire Safety is interested in developing a partnership with VCIL to create Fire Safety 802. The goal is to install fire and carbon detectors that are accessible and affordable.

**Public Comment-**

A discussion about subgroups at the next meeting was requested. They were originally formed to create the legislative report.

**Meeting was adjourned at 11:51**