

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

September 16, 2021

Meeting held virtually by Zoom

WSOC (Red Oak Conference Room)

## Welcome/Housekeeping/Announcements

The new council website is live and continues to be a work in progress with the meeting agenda, minutes, and council mission and vision. The link can be found here.

<https://dail.vermont.gov/resources/boards/deaf-hard-hearing-deafblind-council>

The Council is in need of members to take minutes at each meeting. Without a Council Secretary, we will rotate thru this assignment meeting to meeting.

## Program/Organizational updates

VCIL – Will Pendlebury

- VCIL is in the midst of recruiting and interviewing for their Deaf peer advocate position. There were questions from the council about deaf applicants who had not received responses when applying and if the interview process includes deaf people. Will Pendlebury will follow up with Sarah Launderville, VCIL Executive Director.
- RISE Fund Status. This fund is continuing, and more information can be found here: <https://vcil.org/services/rise-fund/> Peter Johnke, VCIL Deputy Director is the best contact regarding RISE Funding.

VANCRO - Will Pendlebury & Jessica St Arnauld

- Vancro is the primary interpreter referral service here in Vermont since VIRS closed in Spring 2021. Jessica St Arnauld, is the referral manager for Vancro services in VT.
- Will Pendlebury reported that Cory Brunner, Vancro Vice President of Interpreting Services, Diane Dalmasse, VT VocRehab Director and James Smith, VT VocRehab Policy Manager met to discuss consideration of the BEI being considered here in VT as an assessment tool of work readiness for interpreters who yet to have national certification. The plan is to have VT VocRehab and Vancro partner on the implementation of this assessment, then eventually the BEI would be self-sustaining. More information can be found about the BEI: <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/assistive-services-providers/board-evaluation-interpreters-certification-program> from the Texas Health and Human Services Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS).
- Vancro is also in connection with The University of Vermont to see what partnerships can be developed within the ASL and Deaf studies class offerings for interpreter training.
- Jessica St Arnauld reports that the Vancro fill rate is about ~90%. However, this percentage is not completely accurate due to cancelations and assignment rebooking.

Please feel free to contact Jessica with any Vancro related comments/questions  
[jessica.starnauld@vancro.com](mailto:jessica.starnauld@vancro.com)

#### VTAD – Elena Shapiro

- VTAD is currently working on its bylaws and elections for new officers. An October 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Statewide meeting is planned, however, it is not clear if that will be virtual or in person. As of today, it is planned to be in person in White River Junction.

#### HLAA – Deb Baker

- The VT HLAA chapter has been quiet this summer, taking some time off. However, the Steering Committee met on September 1st to plan for the upcoming year. The next HLAA chapter meeting is October 6th, 12-1 pm ET. A representative from Inno Caption: <https://innocaption.com/> will be in attendance. The presentation will be focused on the Inno captioning service for cell phones. The meeting is open to the public and all council members are welcome to attend.

#### ARPA – Megan Tierney-Ward

- 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). AHS is leading this for VT, with a public comment period this summer. 65 letters and over 80 people attending the public hearing, with 120 ideas on how to use the funding. This funding is related to state match funding for Medicaid dollars for Home and Community-Based Services. There is currently a workgroup working on all comments received further details about the ARPA Home and Community-Based Services enhanced funding can be found at: <https://humanservices.vermont.gov/about-us/medicaid-administration/global-commitment-health-1115-waiver/home-and-community-based#:~:text=Home%20and%20Community-Based%20Services%20Enhanced%20Funding%20Section%209817,Expand%2C%20and%20Strengthen%20HCBS%20under%20the%20Medicaid%20Program>
- VT currently has conditional approval. Thus partial money is expected at the end of October for the first two quarters. All plans need to be in place in early 2022. This funding impacts council constituents as stakeholders and/or groups could apply for funding that impacts the populations we represent.
- Another update will be shared with the council at our November meeting.

#### VT EDHI Linda Hazard

- This will be the first year EDHI will be submitting the identified patient-level data to the CDC rather than aggregate data on all of the babies born in Vermont. This will be starting for the birth year for 2020. This was tested with 11 states, and now is being rolled to all states who have the funding.

## **D/HH/DB Directors Report – Laura Siegel**

- The [Final Budget Bill](#) of the 2021 Legislative Session required Department of Financial Regulation (DFR) and other state health organizations to do the preliminary steps in applying to change Vermont’s Essential Health Benchmark plan to include hearing aids. The Department of Financial Regulation have been holding stakeholder meetings which include the Hospital Association, commercial payers, various State Health agencies and the Green Mountain Care Board. At the most recent meeting, Laura Siegel (Director for D/HH/DB) presented with Julie Porter (UVMHC Audiologist) to the stakeholder group and provided demographic and clinical data showing the importance of making Hearing Aid coverage affordable and accessible to Vermonters. HearHearVermont (<https://www.vermontelders.org/hearhearvermont>) also presented which is a coalition working together to improve hearing health access in Vermont. Rebecca Chalmers (HLAA VT), Philene Taormina (AARP), and Theo Kennedy (SILC) presented on behalf of the coalition “Hear Hear Vermont.” HearHearVermont advocated for continued transparency and inclusion in the stakeholder benchmarking process. DFR received approval for a grant to hire a firm to do the actuarial analysis which will include hearing aid costs as part of full analysis. DFR invited HearHearVermont to provide examples of other coverage plans that advocates want to be references as part of the actuarial analysis and final report.
- Laura is also working with the Department of Fish and Wildlife about updating their videos to ensure they are accessible via captioning or have a picture in picture (PIP) with an ASL interpretation. Additionally, like the DMV, they are developing a visor card.
- AHS has partnered with Laura in regards to Deaf and Hard of Hearing accessibility at the state level. Laura is working with AHS as a pilot to model to other state agencies around best practices, policies, and training when working with Deaf/DeafBlind/hard of hearing Vermonters, and interpreters.
- Laura is working with the DOH regarding advice around COVID vaccine providers ensuring staff are using and have access to clear masks and communication cards when working with Deaf/DeafBlind/hard of hearing patients. The DOH is interested in hosting a focus group regarding health for this population of Vermonters. If you know of individuals who might be interested please reach out to Laura.
- Laura is currently drafting a DeafBlind prospectus which will develop an RFP to set up a pilot program for SSP services in Vermont.
- Please be in touch with Laura Siegel directly if you have any comments/questions. [laura.siegel@vermont.gov](mailto:laura.siegel@vermont.gov)

## **Agenda topic - D/HH/DB Student Services/AOE Grant Discussion**

On July 19, 2021, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) awarded a new program to provide consultative services to school teams and families of students (age 3-22) who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind (DHHDB). This program will be part of the University of Vermont Center

on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI) and led by Margaret Overman (Vermont HEARS, LLC) and Darren McIntyre (Vermont I-Team at CDCI). This program, at this point, is being referred to as the School-Age Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Services Program or, the DHHDB Consulting Program.

Historically 9 East Network applied for this AOE grant, however did not this past grant cycle. This change in service providers has impacted the community greatly with concern and question as to how services will be provided moving forward.

Services for children birth to 3 years old (Parent Infant Program at Nine East) and American Sign Language (ASL) and Bilingual Education Services are not part of the new DHHDB Consulting Program. To fill this gap the University of Vermont Medical Center Vermont Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (VTEHDI) Program volunteered to take on the parent-infant program and the ASL bilingual groups of services.

In mid-August, two community forums were held as an open discussion as to the changes implemented via this grant. The forums were well attended, however, it is clear there is much work left to be done. The community has requested further communication and guidance to clearly see how these changes are impacting the system for Deaf/DeafBlind/hard of hearing children and their parents here in Vermont.

FAQ information sheets have been developed and distributed both by the DHHDB Consulting Program and the UVM Vermont Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (VTEHDI) Program. A comprehensive matrix is also in development to share in one document the range, availability, and contacts of services provided to Deaf/DeafBlind/hard of hearing individuals aged birth to 22+ living in Vermont. It is anticipated this matrix will be posted on the DAIL website once complete.

Council members were given an opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns with the representatives at the meeting from the AOE, VTEHDI, and the DHHDB Consulting Program. Representatives in attendance were:

- Chris Kane - AOE, Assistant State Director of Special Education [christopher.kane@vermont.gov](mailto:christopher.kane@vermont.gov)
- Alex Langevin - AOE, Coordinator of Instructional Strategies [alex.langevin@vermont.gov](mailto:alex.langevin@vermont.gov)
- Linda Hazard - VTEHDI [linda.hazard@uvmhealth.org](mailto:linda.hazard@uvmhealth.org)
- Margaret Overman - DHHDB Consulting Program [margaret.Overman@uvm.edu](mailto:margaret.Overman@uvm.edu)
- Darren McIntyre - DHHDB Consulting Program [DHHDB@uvm.edu](mailto:DHHDB@uvm.edu)

The council's discussion included themes around:

- Process of the grant application development and selection criteria
- Duplicate systems of service providers and streamlined collaboration
- The realities of staffing capacities and expertise

- Referral process for services. What that looks like now and how that can be improved?
- Grant required stakeholder group. What does that look like? How can people get involved?
- Outcomes and reporting of data
- Alternate service providers outside of VTEHDI, and the DHHDB Consulting Program
- Accountability of both service providers and AOE
- Monitoring and oversight of grantees
- Planning for the next grant cycle. How can it be better?

The following questions were left in the chat and will need to be answered.

- Can the AOE address how the state views spending dollars to support the duplicative admin structures to support these 2 different entities?
- If wanted, Audiologists can contact EHDI directly instead of CDCI? When do parents get a chance to voice what they want?
- Do parents know how they can get access to EDHI as well as the UVM CDCI? What is the mechanism for informing the most important stakeholder - the families?
- Do you have a point of contact to have a recurring forum to allow parents/TOD/ Interpreters to have their voice heard and you share updates and what is necessary for them to know with this change?
- The federal agencies face budget challenges every year. EHDI has multi-year grants and it is clearly stated in our Notice of Awards and Agreements that funding is dependent on the federal budget passing. There are years that the funding is less than what is expected. Is this something that can be implemented by the state?

#### **Other Business – 2022 Legislative Report**

This process will need to start soon between Council Co-Chairs Will Pendlebury and Spenser Weppeler, Laura Siegel, VT Director of Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind Services, and Megan Tierney-Ward, DAIL Deputy Commissioner to identify the reports' topical Outline, priorities, and recommendations.

#### **Public Comment**

There was no public comment

Meeting Adjourned at 12:00 pm ET

**Next meeting:** November 18th, 9:30 am -12 pm ET.

### Council Attendance

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spenser Weppler (Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Julie Porter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elena Shapiro
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Will Pendlebury (Co-Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kate Parish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Lalanne
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Hudson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alex Langevin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracy Hinck
<input type="checkbox"/> Ralph Gallo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Megan Tierney-Ward	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Chalmers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Danielle Howes	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sharon Henry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Linda Hazard	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amelia Briggs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deb Charlea Baker	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kelley Decker	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sherry Sousa	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Guest Attendance

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Chris Kane	Agency of Education
Darren McIntyre	CDCI DHBB Consulting Program
Jessica St. Arnaud	VANCRO
Kelly Locke	?
Laura Siegel	D/HH/DB Director
Margaret Overman	CDCI DHBB Consulting Program
Michelle John	VT Hands and Voices
Jen Raney	Interpreter
Kristal Hier	Interpreter
Diane	White Coat Captioning