

Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind Advisory Council

March 18, 2021

Zoom Video Conference

9:30-12:00

ATTENDEES

Board Members: Amelia Briggs, Deb Charlea Baker, Julie Porter, Kate Parish, Laura Siegel, Linda Hazard, Ralph Gallo, Megan Tierney-Ward, Rebecca Chalmers, Sharon Henry, Sherry Sousa, Spenser Wepler, Susan Kimmerly, William Pendlebury

Guests: Liz Perreault

Interpreters: Elizabeth Fox, Kristal Hier, White Coat Captioning

Introductions:

Spenser Wepler and Will Pendlebury

Since the departure of Commissioner Hutt, Megan Tierney-Ward, DAIL Deputy Commissioner, will work regularly with the council. The new Interim Commissioner of DAIL is Monica White who will familiarize herself with the council and be a resource to the council.

Kelly Decker will step into Amy Williamson's spot on the council beginning immediately.

Elena Shapiro will be replacing Laura Siegel on the council as the rep for the VTAD. This is Laura's last meeting as a council member before she begins her new role as the D/HH/DB Services Director at DAIL.

Council Vacancies and Process:

Spenser Wepler

- AJ Van Tassel, who represents the Hard of Hearing community, will not continue past his term.
- Sherry Sousa will be filling the required Superintendent role.
- The Special Education Association will be asked to appoint a special educator to fill that required role on the council.

Spenser asks that the council share with their networks the vacancies the council has. The council will be provided a brief description of each vacant seat on the council to recruit people who fill a needed role.

DAIL and D/HH/DB Services Director Position:

Megan Tierney-Ward, Spenser Weppler, and Will Pendlebury

Laura Siegel has been hired by DAIL to fill the Director of D/HH/DB Services role. Laura's start date is March 29 and will be supervised by Deputy Commissioner, Megan Tierney Ward. The supervision of this position may shift in the future to Interim Commissioner, Monica White.

Megan discussed the with the council how the orientation to DAIL and AHS will go for Laura and that it would be a couple of months of learning. Laura will also be reaching out to stakeholders to arrange times to listen to the needs of the different communities. As information is gathered, the new position will develop.

Laura will be transitioning from a role the council is familiar with to a new role. In Laura's new role, she will work with the council and stakeholders to address the gaps in services. She will also attend council meetings but is not required to be present. She will be available, if necessary, to discuss specific topics and she will attend as her schedule allows.

Updates:

VCIL, Will Pendlebury- No new updates.

VIRS, Will Pendlebury - VANCRO has won the bid for providing interpreting services for the State of Vermont. The contract will be finalized in the following weeks. Once the contract is finalized, VANCRO will need to hire a program manager that will coordinate the interpreting services.

VTAD Laura Siegel - The Vermont Association of the Deaf (VTAD) continues to work on updating the association's bylaws. The association continues to do outreach to the deaf community about COVID-19 giving updates and vaccination information.

HLAA, Deb Baker- The Vermont Chapter of Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) has been meeting monthly. However, more time is needed in-between meetings to do the work. The new schedule is every other month, and the next meeting is April 7.

Focus areas for the association right now are:

1. Masks are making communication for people who are hard of hearing (HH) difficult. The association is encouraging those who are HH to use a live captioning app on their phones or pads.
2. There is a petition for the hearing aid bill that is being considered in the legislature. HLAA and Hear, Hear Coalition have joined forces to get signatures on this petition. Currently, there are 434 signature and 80 personal stories to submit to the legislature.
3. HLAA is encouraging the council members to help promote the passage of this important hearing aid bill.
4. Visit the HLAA you can sign up for the bi-monthly newsletter.

<https://vthearingloss.weebly.com/>

VT EHDI, Linda Hazard- The Vermont Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (VT EHDI) staff continue to work at 1/3 capacity with all other staff working with Vermont Department of Health covering vaccination clinics.

Hearing screenings continue for babies who are 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months old as well as working with hospitals, audiologist, midwives, and early prevention providers.

VT EHDI just submitted the CDC report and are still working on the data management plan. The new system will have VT EHDI reporting de-identified individual patient data versus aggregate data.

Stacy Jordan has been working on virtual hospital visits since COVID-19 presents in person services. Since the UVMHC cyber-attack, Linda has been focusing on telehealth and finding ways to secure individual's privacy and information.

The national partners meet every month now instead of every two weeks. They continue to support 59 EDHI coordinators across the country and territories. The annual meeting was just held virtually in March, and it went well.

Linda announced that she would be stepping down as the Nine East Network Director as of June 30th. She will continue her director role with VT EDHI.

Nine East Network, Susan Kimmerly-

Since the announcement that Linda Hazard is stepping down as the director, the managers at Nine East are developing a plan for the new director.

The Parent Infant Program (PIP) is again facing funding issues this year. The projected loss is \$50,000. The reasons for this loss are because of a lack of participation in the program because it had to be remote and a lot of families either do not like using a virtual platform or cannot use a virtual platform. Another reason for the decrease in funding is there were fewer births. The average number of births since this program began seven years ago was 25 to 30 births per year. This year is projecting to be about 20 births.

The Parent Infant Program is looking at different ways to increase revenue. One option is to create additional fees on top of the decreased Medicaid rate.

The annual meet-up with kids in grades upper elementary through high school will be happening virtually. This will give students and opportunity to see each other.

Three staff members have enrolled in the Granite State College teacher of the deaf certificate program. They all have provisional licenses, so they can teach while going through the certification program. Having staff trained is essential to the program's succession planning.

FEMA, Spenser Weppeler- There is a national call coming up this week that Spenser was asked to participate in. This call will be about ensuring access to vaccinations for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Spenser, Laura Siegel, Megan Tierney-Ward, and Monica White will participate in the call.

Legislative Update, All Members-

- **H.266 Hearing Aid Coverage Bill:** The Hear, Hear Coalition is working hard to push this bill. It did not make crossover; however, it can be attached to other bills and still move forward. As individuals, the council is encouraged to talk to legislators about what a hearing aid is and who uses them.
Rebecca Chalmers made a motion for the council to bring the D/HH/DB Annual Report to the legislative committee chairperson. Sharon Henry seconded the motion. All were in favor. Spenser will email the report to the Health Committee chairpersons.
- **Act H.315 Relay Captioning Program:** Since the pandemic, the use of this program dramatically increased, and the funding ran out. This left the state without the program for a about a week. This week, Senator Lyons in the Senate Health and Welfare committee sent a letter to appropriations asking for \$50,000 to continue the funding of the program though the end of the fiscal year.

Age Subgroups, All- Spenser shared the Deaf/Hard of Hearing/DeafBlind Council Age Subgroups Ga Analysis to be reviewed by the council. The council would like to move forward with reinstating subgroups but based on topic and not age.

Other- Discussion on the new Services Director position in DAIL will be put on the May agenda. This will provide an opportunity to discuss how the new position and the council will work together.

Meeting adjourned: 11:56