

**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**  
**180<sup>th</sup> Quarterly Commission Meeting**  
**January 26, 2024**  
**via Videoconference**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tommy Evans, Melissa Kelly, Michelle Niehaus, Jason Smith, Jeannie Taylor, Eddie Runyon, Alexander Ansley, Gerry Gordon-Brown, Nancy Perry, Barbie Harris, Sarah Roof, Marva Johnson, Edie Ryan, Amy Hatzel, Anita Dowd

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Beth Brinly

**STAFF PRESENT:** Justin Stanley, Emily Kimbell, Blake Campbell

**COMMUNICATION FACILITATORS:** Laura Kogut, Linda Bozeman, Shannon Grider

**VISITORS:** John Perry, Tara Malone, Sam Capsel, Tashina Crowe

**MR. RUNYON MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE 179<sup>TH</sup> COMMISSION MEETING WITH A REVISION REGARDING THE MEETING’S LOCATION AND MS. PERRY’S ATTENDANCE. MS. GORDON-BROWN SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.**

**MS. TAYLOR MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE DECEMBER 8, 2023 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING WITHOUT REVISION. MS. NIEHAUS SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITHOUT DISCUSSION.**

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**REPORTS**

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**Executive Board Report**

Mr. Evans began by recognizing Ms. Taylor for receiving the Virginia Mason award, which is given by the Hearing Loss Association of America. Ms. Taylor thanked Mr. Evans for his recognition and explained some of the history of the award, including Virginia Mason’s personal history. Ms. Taylor also thanked Ms. Niehaus for being present when she accepted the award.

Mr. Evans then noted that Jayna Oakley would be retiring from KCDHH at the end of February and expressed the Commission’s thanks for her years of service.

Mr. Evans humbly noted that he also received an award from the American Speech-Hearing Association in November for his advocacy work on behalf of that organization. Ms. Gordon-Brown congratulated Ms. Taylor and Mr. Evans for their recognition.

Ms. Dowd then asked to recognize Ms. Niehaus's inclusion in the Center for Healthcare Strategies Equity Changemakers Program in 2024. Ms. Niehaus is one of 15 people in the United States who were chosen to be part of this group. The Program's goal is to affect change and increase healthcare equity in state, local, and tribal governments.

Mr. Evans then updated the Commission on the Executive Director search. The Commission completed the formal interview process the previous week. The search committee plans to meet on Tuesday, January 30<sup>th</sup> to review the staff and Commissioner survey results and nominate a selection for final approval.

Mr. Evans reported that Ms. Harris was formally reappointed to her position on the Commission by the Kentucky Association of the Deaf. Mr. Evans thanked McKayla Weaver from the Governor's Office for her assistance with Ms. Harris's reappointment and noted that she is working to expedite Mr. Perry's formal appointment to the Commission as well. Ms. Hatzel has already been nominated to continue to serve with Emeritus status. There will be three open seats on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024: those currently held by Ms. Ryan, Ms. Gordon-Brown, and Mr. Ansley. Mr. Evans encouraged those Commissioners to work with KCDHH staff to ensure that those vacancies are filled as quickly as possible.

## **THE EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.**

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### **Agency Report**

Ms. Dowd gave the Agency Report as Interim Executive Director.

First, Ms. Dowd reported on the agency's legislative efforts. Since previous attempts to advance legislation without the Cabinet have not been successful, a different approach has been taken this session. Ms. Dowd met with the legislative liaison for the Cabinet to provide them with in-depth information about the proposed Deaf Child's Bill of Rights and was very encouraged by the response she received. The current plan is for the DCBR to be proposed during the 2025 legislative session. Ms. Taylor pointed out that the legislation is for all children with hearing loss and that the language of the bill should reflect that. Ms. Dowd, Ms. Gordon-Brown, and Ms. Niehaus agreed. Ms. Niehaus also suggested that the Commission hold a training for lobbyists to familiarize them with issues surrounding hearing loss.

Finances are on target for the year up to this point. TAP equipment contracts have been signed.

KCDHH is monitoring House Bill 6 closely, as it has the potential to affect the ability to fill vacant staff positions. However, Ms. Dowd believes that only one currently vacant position is in danger if the bill becomes law.

Ms. Dowd also reported that posters explaining the option for Deaf/HOH people to add themselves to a Transportation Cabinet database should have gone up after the new year in all Transportation Cabinet facilities where drivers' licenses are conferred.

Ms. Dowd noted that Jayna Oakley and Jessica Endler-Smith were honored by the Kentucky Association of Government Communicators at their annual awards ceremony.

Ms. Dowd noted that she would like one of the upcoming Commission meetings to take the form of an in-person retreat, ideally at a Kentucky state park. She has begun researching potential options for such a retreat.

Ms. Dowd then introduced Emily Kimbell from KCDHH. Ms. Kimbell reported on her work with the Community Impact Council, which works to promote better outcomes in health care. Her work with CIC has two main areas: education of healthcare professionals and training Deaf/HOH people to be self-advocates.

In response to a question from Ms. Perry, Ms. Dowd noted that DeaFestival planning is currently under way. The venue has yet to be determined, but the Galt House and the Kentucky Center in Louisville are currently under consideration.

#### **THE AGENCY REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.**

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#### **Emergency Preparedness Study Group Report**

Ms. Harris delivered the Emergency Preparedness Study Group report.

Ms. Harris met with Blake Campbell and Ms. Dowd at KCDHH to discuss the practical details of implementing region-based information centers for Deaf/HOH people during emergencies. Mr. Runyon underscored the importance of the study group's work with a personal anecdote and thanked Ms. Harris for making progress on this subject.

Blake Campbell added that there are three state-level bodies dealing with these issues: Kentucky Emergency Management, the Department of Public Health, and the Access and Functional Needs Association. KCDHH is currently working with all three to acquire and distribute purpose-made weather radios for the Deaf/HOH that include a strobe light alert.

#### **THE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS STUDY GROUP REPORT WAS ACCEPTED AS READ.**

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## **Old Business**

No old business was considered. The shared drive for Commission members has not yet been implemented.

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## **New Business**

Moving on to new business, Mr. Evans asked Ms. Dowd to discuss the KCDHH strategic plan. Ms. Dowd agreed and noted that the plan has four main goals based on constituent requests and other feedback: (1) equal access to education and employment, (2) healthcare access, (3) safer communities, and (4) hearing loss awareness. Although progress has been made in these areas during her tenure as Interim Executive Director, Ms. Dowd did note that some larger initiatives will necessarily have to wait to be undertaken once the permanent Director is in place. In the meantime, in furtherance of these goals, Ms. Dowd and other KCDHH staff have met or will meet with the Kentucky Bar Association, the Kentucky Hospital Association, the Department of Corrections, the Education and Labor Cabinet, and others.

Mr. Evans then called Commissioners' attention to the proposal in their packets regarding quarterly board reports. Since the Commission is composed of the representatives of various stakeholder groups, Mr. Evans would like to implement a new practice of each Commissioner reporting on any news or developments from their group to the full Commission at each quarterly meeting. Mr. Runyon expressed his enthusiastic support for this idea, although he noted the difficulty he had experienced in communicating with his stakeholder group (AARP). Ms. Ryan echoed Mr. Runyon's sentiments. Mr. Evans acknowledged these difficulties and asked the Commissioners to consider the matter carefully before the next meeting so that a final decision could be made at that time.

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## **Announcements**

- Edie Ryan was given the Virginia Moore Access Award from the Kentucky Educators for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Congratulations!
- The next Executive Board meeting will be held on March 8, 2024, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm, via Zoom.
- The next full Commission meeting (the 181<sup>st</sup>) will be held at the Transportation Cabinet (Room C118), 200 Mero Street, Frankfort, on April 26, 2024 from 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm.
- The following Commission meeting will be held in July, in Room C107 at the Transportation Cabinet.

- Kentucky Hands and Voices has two openings on their Board of Directors: one for an audiologist—preferably a pediatric audiologist—and a parent representative. Applications will be accepted until the end of February 2024.
- The state will be searching for a new EHDI Coordinator soon in the wake of Crystal Johnson’s resignation.

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**MR. SMITH MOVED TO ADJOURN. MS. TAYLOR SECONDED.** The meeting was adjourned at 3:44 pm.