

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

September 21, 2023
9:30am-12:00am
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Welcome/Housekeeping/Announcements

There will be a small group meeting today, RID conference is happening today. Spenser will not be attending, and Will is leading today's meeting. Laura will monitor the chat room. Today's meeting, we will discuss:

- We will have our regular updates from the various constituents and programs.
- An update from the school age subcommittee
- Update from the Director of Deaf Hard of Hearing DeafBlind services.
- Special guest Sierra Downs to provide information and updates on the recent SLP developments in the Legislative work.
- Governor's press conferences and specifically, captioning provided.
- Public comment.

Program/Organizational updates

Valerie Hughes- VCIL- Deaf Independent Coordinator at Vermont Center for Independent Living

Our Montpelier office recently experienced flooding, prompting discussions with FEMA. We observed that relatively few Deaf individuals were affected by the flooding.

During a recent community forum, we delved into Emergency Planning, emphasizing the challenge of effectively disseminating information, especially for those without cell phones or internet access, and in the event of power outages. To address this, a new Task Force Subcommittee will be established.

Similar concerns were raised about housing and the soaring costs of living, particularly affecting those with limited income. This is having a significant impact on individuals in our community.

Jessica Hutchins- VANCRO lead program manager for Interpreting Services

Quick announcement, Bill Hudson recently joined VANCRO part-time as an Administrative Assistant. Working closely with Cory Brunner, we're managing the growing number of requests and expanding SSP¹ pool.

David Krueger – President, Vermont Association of the Deaf

We've conducted successful Town Hall meetings in St. Johnsbury, Bennington, and Brattleboro, with a positive response from the community. Recognizing that some individuals face barriers attending Deaf events due to reasons like transportation and scheduling. VTAD decided to bring events directly to

¹ SSP stands for specialized support provider. SSP provide visual information for individuals with dual sensory losses (vision and hearing).

them. FEMA's Town Halls inspired us to seek information for Deaf victims and future emergencies, particularly related to flooding.

To broaden our community engagement, the Vermont Association of the Deaf website now features its own [census](#) form.

On September 19th, we held a Community Fund Event, noting a need for increased interpreter attendance. To reach a wider audience, we're exploring options like hosting a 5K run or a bike event and seeking partnerships opportunities.

On October 14th, the Castleton Town Hall coincides with the Gallaudet football game against Vermont State University. While Governor press conferences have interpreters, public events lack this provision, relying solely on captioning, which may not suit everyone's needs. Advocacy efforts are underway to ensure interpreters at public events become standard, potential involving legal action or legislative initiatives for mandated access to interpreters and captioning at public forums.

Deb Charlea Baker – HLAA

After a summer hiatus, we're gearing up some important updates:

1. Accessibility in Emergency Announcements: There's a concern that emergency announcements are not accessible to those who are hard of hearing.
2. Legislation in Washington: Ed Markey and Anne Isha are introducing Senate Bill S2494 and House Bill HR4858, focusing on communications, video, and technology accessibility at the CBTA.
3. [Survey on Assistive Communication Technology](#): The Committee for Communications Access in America (CCAA) is conducting a survey open to US residents from September 11 to September 30. Reach out to Stephen O. Frazier at ccainamerica@gmail.com for more information.
4. HLAA Chapter Meeting (September 26th): Join us from 12 to 1 for a presentation by Lise Hamlin, Director of Public Policy at the National Office of HLAA. RSVP at CGOSEdivine@Yahoo.com.
5. HLAA Steering Committee: We're actively seeking new members to join the seven of us. Your help in planning and coordinating guest speakers is much appreciated.
6. Job opportunity – Website Redesign: We're looking for a web designer to revamp our website. If you know someone interested, with some funds available, please contact [Deb](#).

Linda Hazard - EHDI/PIP

We are entering a new grant cycle with the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) on April 1st, and it's a 5-year award. These awards have been ongoing since 2003. Additionally, a new CDC grant will commence on July 1st, maintaining its focus on screening by one month, diagnosis by 3 months for deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind children, with entry into early intervention by 6 months of age.

The Family-to-Family Support initiative emphasizes family engagement and provides deaf and hard of hearing mentors for families. In this new cycle, there is a heightened focus on language acquisition. For children Birth to 3, Vermont EHDI has been actively involved in CDC special projects with the University of Colorado, conducting assessments at age 2, 2 1/2, and 3, with plans to extend to 4- and 5-year-olds to assess kindergarten readiness.

This year, we secured supplemental funding to support assessments. Collaborating with CIS offices, we've offered EHDI training and will continue to facilitate referrals to early intervention throughout the State.

The CMV committee has reconvened to address screening for infants who do not pass initial screenings and to assess the impact of CMV virus, known to pose challenges for D/HH children and their families.

In terms of data, we're actively compiling the 2022 identified patient data for all infants born in Vermont for the CDC – a project involving 39 states. In our Educational Services Program, we have hired new staff, including two speech language pathologists, addressing the shortage both in Vermont and nationally. This year, we expanded into more consultation and technical support. And we currently have 208 student services. And it's growing pretty much daily.

Sharon Henry- Co-Chair of the School Age Subcommittee

The school aged subcommittee is actively planning an educational session, now scheduled for November 6th in the Oak Room at the Waterbury State Complex Office, thanks to a schedule change from July flooding. Our collaboration with Vermont Hands and Voices, along with Michelle John, has broadened the meeting's scope to include not just providers but also parents. We are in the process of revising the flyer for distribution to the Council and request your assistance in sharing it within your respective communities and networks.

Our recent meeting with Superintendents was productive, and we've committed to ongoing education initiatives. This year, our focus is on data. I've sent out a revised data request both to UVM CARES and UVMMC, along with a link to the Federal Office of Special Education's Data Profiles, where states report data on children with IEPs, numbering around 50 to 60 children in Vermont. Notably, there are no federal requirements for reporting on children with 504s or other educational plans. Therefore, it's crucial for the Council to consider data collection, standardization, and a tracking system for comparison, both across states and over time within Vermont.

Any questions or insights from council members on this request or broader need for data standardization? Is anyone aware of existing standards reported in best practice or professional literature for this specific population?

We're nearly done compiling our data, with ongoing considerations for completeness, esp. in the Bennington area and Champlain Valley School District. Collaboration with UVM CARES and UVMMC ESP programs. Maybe CARES will guide this effort? While collecting data on children is more straightforward, it's important to initiate the process starting with UVM CARES and UVMMC ESP programs, as they were recipients of the AOE grant last year.

I seek a thumbs up from council members today to gauge endorsement for moving forward with data collection and standardization. Fantastic! I'll communicate our endorsement to Pam Hoover and anticipate receiving the data from her.

Additionally, Cassie and Laura have raised concerns about requirements for individuals working with D/HH students. These include challenges with referrals, hiring communication facilitators or interpreters, and the need for ASL teachers, sometimes leading foreign language teachers teaching ASL.

We plan to address these concerns within the School Age Subcommittee, with updates to be shared with the Council.

Katie Parrish – HireAbility - Coordinator for the Deaf Deafblind Hard of Hearing Services

We distributed a survey to individuals responsible for offering services and managing programs for youth and high school students in K-12 with DHHDB Services. We currently offer summer career exploration program open to all students. Our goal is to identify any students who might be interested in this program and gauge whether there is interest in bringing together students with hearing loss. The aim is to facilitate discussions and meetings among students who share similar life experience, focusing on advocacy, career development and future career goals. If there is significant interest, we are prepared to address the corresponding needs.

Break

Vermont Speech and Hearing Association Presentation- Sierra Downs

In Sierra's role as an Executive Board member of VSHA, she wanted to highlight their mission. Our entire board is composed of volunteers, all professionals in the field - speech language pathologists or audiologists – working within the State of Vermont. Currently serving as our Legislative Chair, I'd like to share our ongoing work on H86, more commonly known as the Interstate Compact, aiming to enhance access to SLP and Audiology Services through a legislative framework. She shared a

The Interstate Compact, as explained in a PowerPoint presentation to the council, is designed to benefit professionals like SLPs, audiologists, and SLP assistants within Vermont. Specifically, it facilitates the provision of services to individuals from out of state through telehealth. This means that Vermont-based patients, students, and clients can more easily access specialists located outside the state.

Moreover, this compact eliminates the need for SLPs and audiologists to obtain licenses in every state where they may be working with a patient, student, or client. It not only saves costs but also streamlines the process. An essential aspect of our advocacy for this legislation is the emphasis on continuity of care. With the Interstate Compact, established patients or clients can continue receiving services from trusted Vermont-based providers, regardless of their travel needs.

I'm pleased to share that Vermont successfully became the 28th state to adopt the Interstate Compact, with the Governor signing the legislation into law on June 1, 2023.

The practical functioning of this system involves utilizing the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) website, where a directory of providers licensed in various states is available. These providers can offer services through telehealth or in-person visits, provided their state is part of the Interstate Compact, and they are technically licensed in Vermont.

Our hope is that being part of the Interstate Compact will attract more professionals to consider relocating to Vermont, knowing that they can still serve individuals in the states they used to reside in or other states. This aspect of mobility is a significant advantage and aligns with our mission to enhance access and service provision.

D/HH/DB Director's Report

D/HH/DB Director Update – Laura Siegel

Met with Department of Health to ask to review all of their surveys and have input and include the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind community.

Division of Blind and Visual Impairment has just been awarded a grant of \$10 million, (Laura will send the email that she got with the Council) which will allow a number of community partners, people with disabilities, deafblind, deaf, hard of hearing to do a pathway to partnership program post-graduation. And I am offering mentorship component to that. I've been recruiting Linda and others to help work on this. Hoping to follow the exact proposal that Linda had, this year, we're planning to stage it for one year and operational for 5 subsequent years. I've been involved in this summer have been RFPs. One is related to HCBS home based services in residences. There are two home models – one is proposing a number of options for individuals with developmental disabilities, older Vermonters and 2nd is doing a study, collecting information from the community about their experiences with Medicaid and home-based community services. There will be face to face meetings in the community and a community online form.

BGS update is they are currently in the process of finding funding to install a Hearing Induction Loop in one of the front conference rooms in Waterbury State Office Complex.

The State of Vermont is working on intranet access for state workers. An intranet. I've just been approved to create an intranet site, which is available and shared out to everybody, over 70 people and I'm getting a lot of kudos.

I've done about 6 or 7 presentations and have a lot set up reaching out to social workers, to the VA, Veterans, health care specialists, a rather large array of audiences.

In July, I reported about 91 referrals, it's gone up to 135.

DAIL had their employee appreciation day, and I received the Commissioner's Award, thank you Megan!

Commissioner's Report

Megan Tierney-Ward Deputy Commissioner

Health Department has a question on their behavioral survey (BRFSS survey). It's a how many people self-identify as having a hearing disability. We might have an opportunity to work on those questions with them.

Laura sent out the about the home and community-based services, the FMAP grant application process [Link](#). The application's open until October 12th. We've talked about this over the summer. Wendy Graffin and Fran Hodgkin's, they did a presentation.

Governor's Press Conf and Captioning – Deb and all

Deb - Having interpreters and captioning is very important. I think there may be some misunderstanding on the part of the governor's office thinking. Just providing captioning does not serve the needs of people who need an interpreter. I'm at a loss in terms of how a protocol can be set up, who we contact for a protocol to be set up. I have worked for 2 months to get captioning going. I think the Council can

help a policy so anybody in a position of leadership that is making a public announcement needs to be accessible.

I would respectfully request that when advocates are asking for interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing, please don't say hard of hearing. We really need to clarify that there are two different languages and two different types of accommodation that are needed. Respectfully ask that interpreters for the deaf are a wonderful resource and service and captioning is needed for the hard of hearing.

Meg/Will – A reminder the Council only advises the Governor's Office. Suggestion that this be brought to the subcommittee and bring on Deb, Bill and others? Offered to talk to **her** contacts in that office and review and give this message with them. Agreement was shared among attendees.

Megan – Laura has been the voice for this, as well. I could bring the conversation to coordinate communication through our secretary's office up again with the Secretary's Office liaison. Also, communications at the Governor's office. DAIL is a very strong advocate for making communication accessible to everyone, which will be having a debriefing around the flood and can relay that information to the Agency of Public Safety and the Governor's Office.

At the very least, the governor's office could hire CART services and have a stand next to the screen with the captioning.

Deb brought up her conversation with the engineers at WCAX. They conveyed that the technical complexities and the presence of microphones pose challenges. This marked the conclusion of our discussion on the matter. I'm contemplating the possibility of engaging with a broadcasters' association that could serve as a representative body for the industry and potentially participate in our meetings.

Val said that her coworker, Nick and she have been actively reaching out to WCAX, WPTZ, and other channels through calls and emails. Additionally, in a situation where cell phone service is lost or phone service is lost, relying on Facebook becomes ineffective.

Laura contacted the Vermont Association of Broadcasters, and they informed her that each Television station operates independently.

Sharon suggested the mobilization of resources and concerted efforts for the implementation of a public education campaign.

Bill said that data is valuable in illustrating the aging demographic in Vermont. As individuals age, there is a natural decline in both hearing and vision capabilities.

Agenda topic

9:30 – Welcome, Announcements, Reminders - **Will Pendlebury (Spenser has a conflict)**

9:35 – General Updates (5 minutes each)

- a. VCIL – Val Hughes
- b. Vancro – Jessica or others
- b. VTAD – David Krueger
- c. HLAA – Deb Baker
- d. EHDI – Linda Hazard

10:00 – School Age Subcommittee Updates – **Sharon Henry/Sherry Sousa**

10:15 – Director of D/HH/DB Update – **Laura Siegel**

10:30 - Break

10:40 – SLP Developments and Updates – **Sierra Downs**

11:10 – Governor’s Press Conf and Captioning – **Deb and all**

11: 50 – Council Business

a. Next Meeting

11:55 - Public Comment

12:00 - Adjourn

Public Comment

None

Council Business/Conversations:

None

Other Business/Closing

- Captioning and press conference access Subcommittee voted and created. They will formulate by contacting Deb and check at the next meeting.
- Next meeting - November 16, 2023, from 9:30am -12:00pm

Council Attendance

<input type="checkbox"/> Spenser Wepler (Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Julie Porter	<input type="checkbox"/> David Krueger
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Will Pendlebury (Co-Chair)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kate Parrish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Lalanne
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Hudson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cassie Santo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracy Hinck
<input type="checkbox"/> Ralph Gallo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Megan Tierney-Ward	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Val Hughes
<input type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Chalmers	<input type="checkbox"/> Danielle Howes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laura Siegel
<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 type="checkbox"/> Sherry Sousa	<input type="checkbox"/>

Guest Attendance

Name	Organization
Elizabeth Fox	Interpreter
Kristal Hiers	Interpreter
Pam Hoover	UVM CDCI CARSES
Jessica Hutchins	Vancro
Michelle John	VT Hands and Voices
Diane Scott	Captioner
John Pirone	UVM
Sabine Perry	AOE