



State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Meeting
Wednesday, April 2, 2025
Via Zoom

In Attendance

Board Members

Jacob Leffler, Community Member and Chair
Leslie Puzio, Community Member and Vice Chair
Ritchie Bryant, MDAD Representative
Susan Beaver, Community Member
Paige Franklin, DeafBlind Representative

Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH)

Usherla DeBerry, Director
Tanea Brown, Outreach Interpreter Manager
Diamon Halliburton, Administrative Assistant
Laura Lugar, Executive Assistant at the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)

Others

Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General
ASL and Voice Interpreters
Community members (non-participating; viewers only)

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM, marking the first regular board meeting of the year. Chair Leffler welcomed everyone and noted that the evening's agenda was extensive, with a primary focus on regulations related to interpreters ("regs"). The agenda was approved following a motion by Member Bryant, seconded by Vice Chair Puzio, and carried by the board.

The minutes from both previous meetings were then considered for approval. Member Bryant moved to approve, with Vice Chair Puzio seconding the motion. Member Beaver requested a correction, changing a date from 2028 to 2026, which Member Franklin agreed to update. The minutes were approved as amended.

Board updates covered activities from December to April. During this period, board members met with various groups (including hearing, deaf, interpreters, and non-interpreters) to discuss concerns and gather feedback regarding the regulations. The board responded to inquiries that were seeking clarification on the regulations, but also referred all questions and comments to the “public comment” form. The board also responded to inquiries from Senate delegates. Chair Leffler emphasized that tonight’s discussion would center on these regulations and noted that Attorney General Sonnenthahl was present to assist.

ODHH report out: Director DeBerry reported ongoing collaboration with DSD on the regulations, which are currently pending further action based on tonight’s meeting outcome. Once a clean copy of the regulations is available, they will need to go back to DSD (Division of State Documents) for final approval before posting for public comment. Chair Leffler, Vice Chair Puzio, and AAG Sonnestrahl discussed with Director DeBerry about the timeline for getting the regulations posted for public comment. AAG Sonnestrahl stated that if we (the board) were able to get the regulations to him ASAP, then he can do a final review to ensure accuracy in format and legal requirements. Director DeBerry was asked when the next DSD meeting was, and she stated April 4th (which was Friday of this week). She stated that DSD met every two weeks, and we could submit in time for either the 4th or the next session.

She also mentioned that two office positions had been offered and are awaiting responses. Vice Chair Puzio inquired about the status of applications for PRCID representatives. PRCID recently re-established an interim board, and ODHH requested names for board representation. Vice Chair Puzio inquired about any current applicants who have been waiting for review/appointment. Director DeBerry stated they are in the process of reviewing those applications.

Member Bryant asked about the legislative session timeline. Director DeBerry responded that the session would end this month, with the first bills to be signed starting April 8, 2025, and the process wrapping up by the second week of May.

Manager Brown reported ongoing work on both the soft and hard launch of the portal. Chair Leffler added that various groups would be testing the portal, with Manager Brown coordinating the testing dates. Chair Leffler asked if these had started yet, per the timeline previously provided to Chair Leffler and Vice Chair Puzio. Manager Brown reported they had not. The portal is still not ready for license applications, but updates will be provided to the board as progress is made.

There were no additional reports, so the board turned its attention to the regulations. The board had previously approved the regulations in the fall (September or October), however, since the regulations were not through ALER or DSD, after various meetings, townhalls, and internal review of the regulations, the board chose to move ahead with edits now to prevent even further delay of posted/approved/final regulations. The plan is to review proposed changes, discuss them, and finalize the language for resubmission.

Vice Chair Puzio clarified that the board had withdrawn the previous regulations and would be making changes tonight before resubmitting. The discussion began with Reg. .03(2), the definition of ASL. Chair Leffler suggested revising the language to better reflect different modes of communication, such as total communication, SEE, PSE, and ASL, to ensure inclusivity for various clients. After reviewing line 9, the board agreed that the language was satisfactory. Member Bryant reminded everyone that regulations are flexible and can be updated as needed.

The discussion moved to video remote interpreting, with an emphasis on ensuring that VRI interpreters are licensed. Chair Leffler raised the issue of requiring BEI level 3 certification, a change from the previous level 4 requirement. After considering the BEI and RID continuing education requirements, the board agreed to set the standard at intermediate level, with a five-year renewal cycle.

Attention then shifted to provisional licensing. The board discussed how the law is written; it doesn't allow for educational stipulations, only requiring EIPA. For full licensure, an individual MUST be certified (RID, BEI, or NAD). They confirmed the need to remove the option for permanent licensing at this time. However, it was discussed (and confirmed by AAG Sonnestrahl) that educational requirements could be added to the provisional license. Regarding Educational interpreter requirements, Member Beaver and her workgroup presented several recommendations regarding the EIPA: all must pass the written test. For performance level: setting a minimum score of 4.0, or a minimum sign language score of 3.5. The board discussed whether to set the score between these two to ensure a higher level of skill, while also allowing more educational interpreters to obtain a level to work. Vice Chair suggested 3.75, but clarification was made that the scores are on the .10 level, so the board discussed a 3.7 score. The board felt this decision balanced high standards with the need to maintain a sufficient pool of interpreters. Ritchie suggested allowing a lower score for provisional licenses, provided local school systems support interpreters in achieving a 4.0. The board agreed to review related video materials before finalizing this decision.

Chair Leffler clarified that provisional licenses would be valid for one two-year period.

Chair Leffler asked AAG Sonnenthal to explain the OAH process for handling complaints, since there was still a lot of confusion. ODHH collects all complaint information and verifies that they have everything needed to review a complaint. The Board reviews the complaint and provides a decision to the complainant and the individual against whom the complaint was against. The individual who had the complaint against them has the right to appeal the decision to OAH for a hearing. OAH conducts fact-finding and writes a report to the Board on its recommendations. The board has final say in the results. Chair Leffler questioned whether to remove proposed language changes to the complaint process, but the board decided to retain the new language, as it preserves the appeal process.

Vice Chair Puzio stated that the Board was concerned that they are not trained in complaint review. She asked AAG Sonnestrahl if other boards have training or if training is available. Director DeBerry stated there is training. Vice Chair Puzio asked if this could be provided to the

Board. Director DeBerry stated that training could be provided. ODHH will provide board training if needed. The board agreed to keep the original language regarding appeals.

Another topic addressed was how services are provided (in-person or via VRI) and consumer preference. It was affirmed that individuals requesting interpreting services have the right to choose how those services are provided.

Member Bryant moved to accept the new additions to the regulations, with Member Franklin seconding. The motion carried.

Vice Chair Puzio asked when the 30-day public comment period would begin. AAG Sonnestahl explained that the regulations must first be formatted appropriately before posting, which could be done in a day or two. After that is completed, Director DeBerry will submit the regulations to DSD immediately.

With no further comments or business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 PM.