

§ 9-2404. Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH)--March 8, 2019

*First Quarterly Meeting*  
*September 13, 2019*

**MACDHH Council Members:**

**Present:** Chair Larry Gray, Vice Chair Marny Helfrich, Secretary Vikki Porter, Dakota Burgess, Spencer Dove, Janet Moye Cornick, Greg James, Mary Lynn Lally, Jed Miller, Gordon Outlaw, Erin Buck Skees, Stephanie Summers, and Victoria Wilkins.

**Absent:** Jason Corning, Lisalee Egbert, and Karunya Samuel

**Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) Staff:** Kelby Brick, TraciAnn Hoglind, and Jacob Salem.

**Call to Order:** 2:18 PM

**Meeting Minutes:** Minutes from June 2019 were accepted with corrections (LisaLee Egbert's and Vikki Porter's names were misspelled).

**Chair Gray's Report:** Chair Gray confirmed there was quorum before proceeding with the meeting. He announced that Eddie Laird has resigned from the Council due to moving to Florida for his retirement. Chair Gray announced that there was a financial education roundtable that took place at ODHH offices, hosted by the National Disability Institute in partnership with the Bank of America. The goal is to determine what type of education and support would be needed to help deaf people master their finances. There will be another meeting at a later date to be determined.

**Vice Chair Helfrich's Report:** None.

**Secretary Porter's Report:** None.

**ODHH Director Brick's report:** Director Brick commented on the just-concluded Naming Ceremony honoring two deaf trailblazers: Dr. Gertrude Galloway and Dr. Ernest Hairston. Their names and likenesses are now etched over the entrances of ODHH's office and conference room. Director Brick commended these individuals for making a significant impact on the Deaf community. He stated that ODHH is looking into exercising their authority for developing regulations in regards to the interpreting licensure issue. A decision hasn't been made yet on that front. ODHH is also considering a centralized interpreting system. The Department of Public Safety is looking for correctional officers who are fluent in sign language. Director Brick encourages any deaf person fluent in sign language to apply for these jobs—in food service, social work, and so on. The warden fully supports employing deaf individuals. October 14<sup>th</sup> is Legislative Awareness Day, which will have an awards portion and festivities. Also, ODHH is becoming more active on social media and communicating with the public in various ways, despite having a small staff. Chair Gray and Secretary Porter concurred, encouraging councilmembers to check out their increased efforts. Councilmember Lally asked about the Maryland Relay Director position. Director Brick said that David Bahar was hired for that position. Mr. Bahar has a strong background in relay services—including Virginia State Relay, Convo, and federal relay. On another note, ODHH, in partnership with their counterparts in Virginia, hosted the annual National Association of State Agencies for Deaf and Hard of Hearing conference. Director Brick said it was a success.

**Old Business:** Councilmember Dove inquired about the status of the representatives from the Department of Disabilities. Chair Gray responded that they would not be able to make it due to a scheduling conflict but hopefully, they would be able to come to the council meeting next time. Councilmember Outlaw asked about the question that was raised a few Council meetings ago about communication access for deaf motorists being pulled over by the police. Director Brick explained that more and more states are providing placards identifying deaf drivers that would be placed over the visor. However, Director Brick decided to indefinitely suspend the placard products because data showed that there was increased risk for deaf drivers, particularly people of color. Another idea from a community member who lost her hearing much later in life was to have standardized license plates identifying deaf drivers, and that was again seen as an increased risk for deaf drivers to become victims of crime. Currently, ODHH is looking at providing training to State Police, but the issue is different procedures for those in training and those already in service. Howard County Association of the Deaf has been working closely with the county government and police force to develop strategies, and that conversation continues to this day. Director Brick stressed the need for systemic

solution that doesn't contribute to increased systematic oppression, and interaction between law enforcement and deaf citizens that is safe for everyone involved. But the placard idea is not acceptable.

**New business:** Councilmember Moyer Cornick discussed the recent Walmart issue where the company was not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) because of not providing sign language interpreters and accessible training materials for their deaf and hard of hearing employees. She also expressed concerns about certain fast food establishments denying services to deaf and hard of hearing consumers at the drive-thru. Chair Gray agreed, noting that in many situations, deaf individuals aren't able to buy/understand things and getting fired due to lack of communication access. He reiterated that people need to follow ADA, which is the law. Councilmember Dove pitched in, saying that the Walmart issue was of significant interest to the agency he is representing, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR), because of their enforcement on the state level. He explained the relationship MCCR has with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Councilmember Dove stressed that MCCR can't take action if people do not report violations to the agency. Next item for new business is student loan forgiveness. Chair Gray asked if the State of Maryland has anything similar to that due to the fact a large number of people are being turned down at the federal level. He is aware about vocational rehabilitation support and scholarships, but wondered if there are other programs to help alleviate people of post-secondary education debt. Director Brick explained that the state of Maryland provides tax credit for student loans. There is a video online in ASL explaining the process. Councilmember Dove stated that he received tax credit for his loans, and that the credit is based on your tax returns, the amount of money you've paid into your student loans, and so forth. It took him about 20 minutes to apply/refile online. Councilmember Outlaw mentioned that his department has a program for students who have college debt that wants to purchase a new home or other qualified real estate properties can have up to 30 thousand dollars forgiven. Councilmember Moyer Cornick asked if people who take advantage of that program be taxed on the forgiven amount, and Councilmember Dove mentioned that to his understanding he didn't think so as language was inserted in the budget a few years ago where debt forgiveness is no longer considered income because of the federally subsidized loans. Councilmember Summers asked about free tuition at community colleges, and Chair Gray said it depended on family income and must be registered within two years of high school graduation. Councilmember Lally reflected on her recent trip to Seattle Washington for the Deaf Seniors of America ninth conference, which was attended by nearly a thousand people. Instead of the more festive and social tone of conferences past, this year was focused more on serious issues such as housing and different resources. One thing of interest she learned was that agencies in the State of Maryland cannot initiate legislation. Currently, nine states have agencies with that capability. Councilmember Lally wanted to see if this option can be addressed legislatively.

**Announcements:** Chair Gray indicated the next three Council meeting dates and asked if there were any conflicts. He also announced he will emcee the Legislative Awareness Day event happening on October 14<sup>th</sup>. There will be a panel discussion and an awards ceremony. Also, Deaf Culture Digital Library will be hosting two events: a presentation on September 24<sup>th</sup> entitled *Is Deaf Access in the USA and Worldwide Equal?* by Kate Breen at the Germantown library, and *Poetry with Willy Conley* at the Baltimore County Public Library on October 7<sup>th</sup>. Chair Gray also explained the purpose of Friends of the Library, which helps fund special programs not directly tied in with the library, such as the two aforementioned events. Friends of the Library is dependent on donations, and he implored people to spread the word. For Hispanic Heritage Month, Chair Gray will facilitate two events at Gallaudet University—one is a Latinx LGBT panel on October 7<sup>th</sup>, and the other is a deaf Latino men gathering which is a chance for camaraderie and support.

**Meeting adjourned:** 3:04 pm