

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

*Second Quarterly Meeting
December 9, 2019(Corrected)*

MACDHH Council Members:

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

Absent: Karunya Samuel

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

Call to Order: 2:11 PM

Meeting Minutes: Minutes from September 2019 were accepted without corrections.

Chair Gray's Report: Chair Gray was the emcee for the second time at the Legislative Awareness Day (LAD) event that took place on October 14. One of the invited presenters, Dr. Steve Weiner, talked about advocacy and how to successfully implement that within the D/deaf community on local, state, and national levels. Additional portions of the LAD event included a panel discussion about advocacy with various community members as well as the awards ceremony. Chair Gray provided an update on the financial literacy roundtable involving ODHH, National Disability Institute (NDI), and Bank of America (BOA). Currently, planners are narrowing down discussion topics. More details should be forthcoming. Chair Gray also applauded companies making recent efforts towards accessibility, such as a national cable provider and nation-wide banks for providing customer services in American Sign Language (ASL). Regarding the Interpreter Licensure Bill, Chair Gray, along with Secretary Porter and Director Brick, attended a townhall on November 7 that was hosted by an entity labeled as "The Deaf Community" and comprised of presumably D/deaf community members who wished to remain anonymous. The spokesperson for the entity facilitated the townhall about the status of the progress—or lack thereof, according to general community—in crafting the bill for state legislature. Discussion arose about the repeated delays, lack of transparency and communication, and confusion about ODHH's and various deaf-focused community organizations' involvement. Council member Corning reminded the Council that the versions of the bill have never actually made it through to the State House/Senate floors. Chair Gray concurred and stated he would like to see more community involvement moving forward. Related to the confusion about the role ODHH plays in different issues impacting the D/deaf community, Chair Gray noted that ODHH should clear up misconceptions about the office, such as clarifying what it means to be a coordinating office versus a state agency. He suggested that ODHH post the information on the website and hoped the information would be readily available for the next Council meeting. Chair Gray also discussed the text-to-911 service that is due to be implemented throughout the state of Maryland. Presently, Frederick County is the only county fully operating the service, so Chair Gray reported that his county of residence—Prince George's County—has the funding on hand and testing has been completed. Current status is they are waiting for the other counties so every county can roll out simultaneously, and right now there is no definite timeline for rollout.

Vice Chair Helfrich's Report: Vice Chair Helfrich announced the official launch of the Maryland Hearing Aid and Language and Communication Video Loan Bank. Known as "the loan bank," families can request hearing aids as well as video resources about ASL, cued speech, and spoken language. In addition to available links on the website, DVDs can also be requested for borrowing, and the office will be happy to mail them out. Currently, there's a small number of resources published, and if there's a need to add more, please share that feedback. The website is at <https://marylandlearninglinks.org/maryland-hearing-aid-loan-bank/>.

Secretary Porter's Report: Secretary Porter contacted people in charge of the text-to-911 service in Montgomery County, and it's the same status as Chair Gray's county, with the addition that they are interested in including not just text, but video. The person in charge explained that receiving emergency video calls would require more and specialized training since certain subject matters on the video can be traumatizing to the operators. They are focusing on upgrading/enhancing their system, and waiting for the state to announce rollout. Council member Lally stated that some counties with a larger Deaf population need to implement rollout sooner than later. Director Brick cautioned that one thing to keep in mind about the advantage of standard statewide rollout is because constituents who may not be familiar with county boundaries would be confused as to why text-to-911 service may not be working properly and increase the danger of the overall situation they are trying to contact 911 about. The preferred approach is to wait until all of the counties have access. Director Brick reiterated that it's not the equipment and/or funding issues that is preventing implementation. Secretary Porter agreed and encouraged all of the Council members to contact their respective counties to ask about the rollout.

ODHH Director Brick's report: Staff member Hoglind reported that the ODHH/NDI/BOA financial literacy initiative is well in the planning stages, with three workshops slated to be held in three areas: Frederick, Baltimore, and Eastern Shore. Once logistics are nailed down, information—including the topics—will be shared. Staff member Salem provided an update about curriculum objectives about Deaf history, Deaf rights, as well as information about the Deaf holocaust. He also reported that since the Hearing Accessibility Advisory Board passed a bill requiring hearing loop systems in government facilities. That bill recognized ODHH's efforts, and Staff member Salem requested that if there's anyone who is using the hearing loop system to please contact ODHH before legislature is in

session to be informed of its effectiveness. Director Brick talked about LAD awards ceremony, recognizing leaders of the community who were instrumental in advocacy and creating change. See various ODHH social media platforms for the awards honorees and more information. He also remarked on a recent issue that came up regarding the search for the statewide coordinator position with the Maryland Deaf Cultural Digital Library. — One candidate went through the process, but did not meet one of the screening factors for the position as required by law: that the coordinator must be Deaf. ODHH intervened and reminded DCDL of the requirement, resulting in the screening and vetting process being restarted. DCDL is now looking for applicants, so if anyone on the Council knows someone who may be qualified, please share information about the vacancy. Director Brick commented that ODHH is currently monitoring the issue of unqualified interpreters and is planning to host more ODHH-sponsored townhall meetings to address this. This effort is not to be confused or commingled with the November 7th townhall meeting, in which Council member Egbert asked about and Director Brick reaffirmed that ODHH had no involvement with. Since the past townhall meetings happened in Frederick, Germantown, and Hagerstown, ODHH is eyeing the possibility of hosting in Baltimore City, Washington DC suburbs, and Eastern Shore. Director Brick welcomed suggestions for other areas of the state to host these townhalls. Council member Lally asked about updates regarding the National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Director Brick explained the purpose of the group is sharing information and resources. The recent conference this past August was co-hosted by ODHH and the Virginia Department on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Council member Lally asked if ODHH was aware of District of Columbia's effort in establishing their own office/commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Director Brick answered in the affirmative, stating that ODHH does provide technical assistance but do not get involved in other states/territories' politics. Concerning the matter of the proposed action of moving Maryland Relay from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD), Director Brick deferred that matter to the MDOD representatives who were invited guests at the Council meeting today.

Old Business: None.

New business: Chair Gray introduced Christian Miele, the Deputy Secretary of MDOD. With his background as an attorney and experience in policy, Miele is responsible for managing the legislative portfolio for MDOD as well as leading the policy team. To date, since it was founded in 2004, MDOD is the only state department with the dedication and exclusive focus on people with disabilities. He explained that MDOD has policy directors in all of the core areas of government: transportation, emergency preparedness, employment, and so on. MDOD's mission is to ensure that issues are being looked at via lens of people with disabilities and that their voices are heard. MDOD administers a few direct service programs, of which one is Access Maryland. Access Maryland is a capital grant program that funds on average about 12 infrastructure and accessibility improvements to state-owned buildings and facilities. Last year's most notable improvement is Davidge Hall, the oldest medical education building in the country.

Miele also touched on the Maryland Relay issue, noting that there were some concerns raised regarding the transition from DoIT to MDOD. Currently, there is a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for shared oversight, and the plans are in the works to make the transition more permanent via legislation. Miele stated that it's a possibility that the legislation would be privately sponsored. Council member Summers asked for clarification about private sponsorship. Miele assured that the results of the transition would be more of a formality, staffing and budget would remain the same, DoIT employees working under Maryland Relay will become MDOD employees, etc. He pointed out that the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) made several recommendations—including that the director of Telecommunication Access Maryland (TAM) be Deaf/hard of hearing. According to Miele, most of the work in drafting the MOU and the bill being crafted to formally transition Maryland Relay has already been done without considerable input from ODHH and the Deaf community, which elicited concerns from various Council members. Council member Lally pointed out that generally, Deaf constituents felt blindsided by the MOU, especially since it was deaf people and deaf community organizations such as Maryland Association of the Deaf that actively helped established Maryland Relay in the first place. Council member Corning acknowledged that there is discomfort regarding the MOU being established without the Deaf community/ODHH's buy-in. He commented that this may be a good opportunity for both departments to prove themselves accordingly, with the possibility of a follow-up analysis. He also stated that one of the recommendations was that the director of Maryland Relay report directly to the MDOD secretary, instead of the usual management layers. Secretary Porter noted that the decision to establish an MOU was apparently already set in stone before ODHH and the Council were aware of its existence. She emphasized a familiar creed well known within the Deaf and other marginalized communities: "nothing about us, without us."

After his presentation, Miele introduced Elizabeth Hall, Director of Inter-agency Affairs at MDOD. Hall stated that she has been with MDOD for approximately three years. In her role, she is the legislative liaison and staff, and is involved with Maryland Commission on Disability and Inter-agency Council for Transitioning Youth. One of her responsibilities is reporting on the analysis of progress in cross disability programs and services in the state of Maryland. One highlight Hall wanted to draw attention to was the progress with behavioral health and Deaf and hard of hearing people to provide culturally appropriate services. Hall clarified a question about the relationship between ODHH and MDOD. Depending on the issue brought on by the constituent, MDOD strives to get them the best resources, and likewise for ODHH. She stressed that MDOD works closely with ODHH on various deaf-related issues, and she is frequently out in the community. Chair Gray thanked both Miele and Hall for their presentations..

Another piece of new business is that Chair Gray put in a request for ODHH to provide a list of counties with their readiness status in terms of personnel, equipment, and facilities in regard to the text-to-911 service.

Secretary Porter proposed that the ODHH consider expanding its staff from three to a number-yet-to-be determined in order to better serve the Deaf community in Maryland. Council members had a robust discussion, with questions ranging from enforcement powers of ODHH and confusion about ODHH's role in terms of operations and decision-making to providing data-based and legal justification for the staff expansion, and the operations of other coordinating offices and state agencies. Private citizen Council members voted, while the state agency Council representatives abstained, and the proposal passed 5 out of 8.

Chair Gray proposed that ODHH investigate the feasibility of adding satellite offices strategically through the state of Maryland. One major complaint about ODHH is that it's currently situated in Crownsville, MD which is considered a relatively remote area. Chair Gray suggested looking at locations such as Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland, and Western Maryland. Another robust discussion ensued, with Council members commenting on the small staff possibly being spread thin, the exact role ODHH should play in direct services, confusion on what ODHH can and cannot do, expending resources to help ODHH work on the 12 authorities it was tasked to work on, and whether ODHH is a systemic policy-based organization. Private citizen Council members voted, while the state agency Council representatives abstained, and the proposal passed 4 out of 6.

Chair Gray, along with Secretary Porter, proposed that ODHH draft up legal regulation for the Governor to consider regarding sign language interpreters in the state of Maryland, with the goal towards reducing unqualified and/or fraudulent interpreters. A vigorous discussion occurred, with the pros and cons of regulation as opposed to legislative process, the ambiguity towards the reasons various versions of the legislative bill were withdrawn over the years, the specific exclusion of educational interpreters, and the amount of the Deaf community's input in the process of drafting the regulation spearheaded by ODHH. The proposal was tabled until the next Council meeting in March.

Announcements: Chair Gray announced the next Council meeting will take place on Friday, March 13th at 2pm. During that meeting, year 2020 goals will be discussed. He encouraged Council members to provide input and ideas. Chair Gray also reminded the Council that the June 8th Council meeting will have election of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary.

Staff member Hoglind informed the Council that the 2020 Census will launch on April 1st, with three mechanisms for responding: email, online, and in-person. She posted a vlog about the Census.

Council member Lally revealed that Frederick County set up an organization called the Maryland Deaf Community Center of Frederick. This will be a permanent place for D/deaf and hearing people to gather for social activities such as book clubs, yoga, parent support groups, and the like. The organization is applying for nonprofit status—501(c)(3), and she stated the organization is also seeking grant money for startup costs. Currently, meetings are scattered all over the county.

Council member Buck Skees shared a couple of events happening at Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD). The high school will have their road show, Canterbury Tales, at the Frederick campus this weekend, after the performance at Columbia campus last weekend. Other locations are planned. She also announced that MSD students have their drawings displayed at the Delaplaine Arts Center. She encouraged people to check these two events out.

Council member Egbert announced that an educational interpreting bill was submitted by Delegate Qi in the House. She explained that the bill would allow interpreters to be either RID or EIPA certified in public schools who serve children 0-21 year of age. There are 3 stages in the bill that would help in the transition from 0 requirements to full certification over the next 7 years: 1) educational interpreters time to reach 4.0 with EIPA with a Bachelor's degree, 2) current RID certification requires for testing and passing, 3) alternative pathways to a RID certification and/or 4) RID certification which are in good standing. CDIs also would be covered within the guidelines of RID.

Meeting adjourned: 4:12 pm