

§ 9-2404. Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH)—December 14, 2020

*First Quarterly Meeting
December 14, 2020 via Zoom.com*

MACDHH Council Members presented and seen via Zoom:

Present: Acting Chair/Vice Chair Marny Helfrich, Secretary Vikki Porter, Bo Byun, Janet Cornick, Veronica Davilla-Steele, Spencer Dove, Larry Gray, Fred Hartman, Gregory James, Edwin Martinez Jr., Norma Moran, Gordon Outlaw, Dawn Padon, Kristen Patterson, Alena Troxel, and Michele Westfall.

Absent: Dakota Burgess and Erin Buck Skees

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

Call to Order: 1:04 PM

Introduction of new Council Members: Acting Chair Helfrich introduced the newest additions to the Council: Bo Byun and Fred Hartman.

Special Presentation: Stephen Hlibok, Acting Chair of the Board of Trustees (BOT) for the Maryland School of the Deaf (MSD), discussed recent developments concerning the school since the summer such as:

Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) concerns

- Acknowledgement of letters received by BOT concerning the Black Lives Matter issues. Some of these letters talked about personnel issues, which are (except for the Superintendent) outside of BOT's purview.
- Formation of six working groups led by staff at MSD designed to address BIPOC issues that were raised, including student life, personnel, educational opportunities, and so forth.

Chief Diversity Officer (CDO)

After identifying this critical need, MSD is currently in the process of finalizing the hire of CDO.

Hiring of Outside Consultant

Idaltu, a consulting group, is reviewing MSD's system, including reviewing manuals/operations and areas impacted by racism and educational issues.

Search for the Next Superintendent

The search is being led by Innivee Strategies, a Deaf-owned consultant business. The company is currently developing a leadership profile with the community's and school's input, including students, teachers, and staff.

Hlibok also touched on the challenging logistics of maintaining both physical and virtual logistics for optimal online learning environment at MSD. After the brief presentation, Council Member Moran asked for the update on the CDO search. Hlibok expanded on the answer by stating that he believes the CDO position is the first of its kind created for any school in the nation. Hlibok explained that BOT has no role with any of MSD staff job position development and hiring process. Since it is considered a state agency, MSD has to comply with the State of Maryland requirements and go through proper channels in the creation of the CDO job description as well as follow the state's hiring process. Hlibok announced the two finalists for the CDO position: Dr. Kojo Amissah and Ms. Charity Jackson. Hlibok reiterated that the school is responsible for the announcement of the final candidate, not the BOT. Council Member Moran also asked how people who are not inside the MSD community be aware of what's happening with MSD. Hlibok welcomed community involvement and was seeking better ways to reach out, one of which is presenting to the Council at this time. He encouraged people to visit MSD website as well as social media sites such as Facebook. Hlibok showed a newsletter from MSD called the Maryland Bulletin, which featured photos of recent MSD graduates—all whom received diplomas, not certificates.

Council Member Gray asked what action MSD will take to ensure that certain concerns from the present and past are not ignored and will continue being addressed. Hlibok pointed out the recent decision to hire an independent consulting firm to look over all the information gathered from the letters, the work groups, newspaper articles, etc. The firm will not only look at operation of the school, but also BOT. All the findings and information will be passed on to the new CDO, and this partnership will be ongoing. Chair Helfrich wondered the role MSD could play in the education of Deaf students with other disabilities such as autism, intellectual/emotional disabilities, and other special needs. Hlibok emphasized that safety of those Deaf-plus students is paramount, and the main reason why the school is not open yet. There is an enhanced service program at MSD which is funded by various sources. Special equipment and other additional support have been provided to those individual students in accordance to their IEPs. Hlibok expressed concerns for Deaf students in the state that aren't currently enrolled at MSD, who may not be getting adequate support and education. He said that is one area MSD could be looking into. As a parent of two children attending the school, Council Member Westfall commended MSD's efforts at ensuring their students continue to receive the best education possible despite COVID. Council Member Moran asked for clarification regarding Hlibok's comment about BIPOC MSD students receiving diplomas the last recent school term versus

certificates. Hlibok explained that he made that comment to clarify some of the statements made in the community letters that BIPOC students did not receive equivalent educational opportunities as their White peers. He wanted to dispel that myth. Acting Chair Helfrich, speaking from her position at Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), explained that there is an option for all students with disabilities in Maryland to receive certificate of program completion, instead of diplomas. These certificate of completions are designed for those students who are in the IEP programs and projected to not being able to meet diploma and high school assessment requirements. These certificates help with the transition from school to life activities, such as obtaining and maintaining a job. When the nonessential travel restrictions are lifted in the future, Hlibok invited all council members to visit both MSD campuses and to subscribe for updates.

Old Business: At Acting Chair Helfrich’s request, Council Member Gray repeated a motion made during the previous meetings back on the floor, due to confusion on whether action was taken on the motion itself. The motion was to have the Inspector General (IG) from the MSDE open an investigation regarding concerns raised by the community related to MSD, which Council Member Davilla-Steele seconded. Council Member Gray explained that even as MSD is taking steps to address community concerns, there is a noticeable lack of representation from the State of Maryland itself, and he wanted to make sure the state is involved in the process and that proper protocol is being followed. Council Member James pointed out from his experience, the results of these IG investigations may or may not be readily available to the public. Council Member Moran mentioned that external involvement in MSD’s affairs is still important, despite the fervor generated by the Black Lives Matter movement tapering off somewhat a few months later. She believed that MSD as a whole has been isolated from operating in a bubble using internal resources to solve internal issues, and not being transparent enough. Council Member Gray concurred and he stressed that having someone outside of MSD checking things out may be a viable approach. Director Brick stated that at the very least, IG investigations could reveal certain gaps and make recommendations for review. The motion was voted on and passed. The breakdown is below:

Council Member, Seat	Roll call vote for Inspector General investigation into MSD
Spencer Dove, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights	Abstained
Erin Buck Skees, Maryland School for the Deaf	Not recorded (absent)
Marny Helfrich, Maryland State Department of Education	Abstained
Dr. Janet Moye Cornick, Maryland Department of Transportation	Aye
Gordon M. Outlaw, Department of Housing and Community Development	Aye
Dr. Bo A. Byun D.M.D., Citizen	Aye
Gregory S. James, Department of Human Services	Abstained
Edwin Martinez, Citizen (DeafBlind)	Abstained
Dakota Burgess, Department of Aging	Not recorded (absent)
Vikki Porter, Citizen	Aye
Kristen M. Patterson, Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation	Aye
Fred S. Hartman, Citizen	Aye
Michele Westfall, Citizen (Parent of a Deaf Child)	Aye
Dawn Padon, Private Agency	Aye
Alena Troxel, Department of Health	Abstained
Norma Moran, Citizen	Aye
Veronica Davila-Steele, Citizen	Aye
Dr. Larry Gray, Citizen	Aye

Meeting Minutes: Minutes from September (regular)/November (special) meetings 2020 were accepted without corrections, with a clarification about ASL/English versions of the Director reports.

Acting Chair Helfrich’s Report: No report at this time.

Secretary Porter’s Report: No report at this time.

ODHH Director Brick’s report: Director Brick extended a warm welcome to the new council members, and thanked the past members for their hard work. He noted the Council is becoming more diverse with individuals with various background and experience contributing in different ways. Director Brick provided recent statistics of the impact of the coronavirus. Nearly 240,000 Marylanders were stricken, and about 4,000 have passed away. He provided an update on the distribution of the vaccine, and that priority groups such as healthcare workers and vulnerable aspects of the population receive priority. One of the groups Director Brick requested be moved up on the priority list is DeafBlind individuals who are dependent on tactile services. GODHH is working with the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) in providing outreach to different constituents with disabilities on how to obtain the vaccine safely. GODHH is also working on expanding the group of both Deaf and hearing interpreters for Governor Hogan’s press conferences. Director Brick stated that GODHH staff Salem is the Chair for the Cultural and Linguistic Competency Committee, and also serves on the behavioral health advisory council. Salem has been working to provide more access to information and service to all individuals with disabilities, as well as encouraging Deaf service providers to work directly with Deaf consumers and patients. Director Brick also announced that MDOD has unveiled the Equal Employment Act (EEA), which helps equalize pay for individuals with disabilities, who have historically received less pay for the same jobs as their able-bodied counterparts. Another project with Salem’s involvement is ensuring new construction for state-owned property and buildings and public-use buildings have wiring access to hearing loops. Director Brick emphasized how the aging and senior population experienced frustrations when needing services, but especially true for those with disabilities. The Department of Aging has a program called “No Wrong Door,” intended to be a

consolidated clearinghouse of resources. GODHH has been involved in conversations with school officials and community members about concerns related to MSD. MSD has reached out to GODHH to ask for assistance in the superintendent search process, which GODHH declined because it is important that MSD maintain their independence in the process. GODHH reminded MSD to follow the Deaf ecosystem principles as a priority. Director Brick reported that with the coronavirus pandemic, mental health issues are on the rise and various other states are grappling with increasing focus on providing access to mental health services to individuals. Maryland was ahead of the curve a few years ago, by approving Medicaid rules for telehealth and mental health therapy for Deaf individuals and patients. These other states are now contacting GODHH to find out how to implement the same details for their own programs. Regarding Legislative Awareness Day (LAD), Director Brick mentioned the well-received townhall meeting, panel, and annual award ceremony that took place over a two-day period in November. He pointed out that Secretary Porter was one of the award recipients and congratulated her. He hoped for more community involvement and partnerships with not just LAD, but other upcoming endeavors and projects.

Council Member Gray stated he enjoyed the LAD panel on the Sign Language Interpreting Licensure (SLIL), and wondered what the status was. Director Brick answered that he was not sure because he did not have that information. He pointed out that previous bills did not succeed, and at this point, he does not have confirmed information. Council Member Martinez inquired about health insurance coverage for hearing aids, noting that some Deaf people cannot afford the purchase for these devices. He suggested that Medicare/Medicaid cover the costs for indigent individuals. Director Brick responded that Salem has been involved in that effort, and about two years ago, the Department of Health changed the rules for Medicaid, which now stipulates hearing aid coverage for all Medicaid recipients up to the age of 18. However, private insurance is a different story, with varying coverage. Acting Chair Helfrich agreed, noting that a Maryland resident may have insufficient insurance coverage for hearing aids through a company based in another state, which Maryland does not have jurisdiction. She emphasized that the state of Maryland does have more coverage and protections for hearing aids than many other states, but not enough to cover every resident.

Elections: Acting Chair Helfrich received one nomination via email for Chair, Council Member Westfall. After asking for more nominations and not getting any, Acting Chair Helfrich moved that Council Member Westfall be elected by acclamation. The motion to vote Westfall as Chair was carried.

New Business: Chair Westfall opened the floor to discuss the formation of the DeafBlind Advisory Council. The motion was made by previous Council Member Jason Corning, but not yet come to a vote. Council Member Martinez reviewed previous meeting minutes and was not wholly familiar with the background and reason for the motion. Director Brick explained that specific mandates, scope, and the like need to be established when recommending subcommittees, and GODHH would be more than happy to assist in those efforts. Council Member Martinez moved to have an exploratory subcommittee formed to focus on the needs of DeafBlind Maryland citizens. Council Member Moran seconded, and the motion was passed.

Next on the agenda is the restructuring of MACDHH. Secretary Porter and Council Member Gray explained the history behind the motion, which was passed circa late 2018/early 2019. After discussion—especially concerns with the meeting time constraints and also being so close to the current legislative session—it was determined to table the discussion and continue the dialogue informally via group email.

Council Member Padon requested that the motion that former Council Member Mary Lynn Lally was working on be placed on the next council meeting agenda.

Announcements: None.

Meeting adjourned: 2:53 pm