

§ 9-2404. Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH)—January 8, 2024  
January 8, 2024 (in person)

**MACDHH Council Members present:**

**Present:** Former Chair: Michele Westfall, Vice Chair: Vacant, Secretary: Vacant  
Members: Veronica Davilla-Steele, Allegra Hollins, Cleveland Horton, Norma Moran, Dawn Padon, Dr. Paige Bradford, Dana Hill, Allysa Dittmar, Mark Tesoro, Lauren Whiteman, Yolanda Dockery, Dianna Yamada, Kristen Patterson  
**Absent:** Bo Byun, Eddie Martinez Jr., John Serrano

**Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) Staff Members:**

Acting Director Usherla DeBerry, Kate Breen, Payal Sharmacharya, Laura Lugar

**Call to Order:** 2:05 PM

**Meeting Minutes:** Minutes from the March 2023 meeting were approved

**Former Chair Michele Westfall’s Report:**

- Michele introduced the MACDHH’s roles for the members.
- Introduction of all attending MACDHH members and GODHH
- Michele has no report to share and shared that she attended the 2023 General Assembly legislative session giving testimony to bills that involved the Deaf and hard of hearing community. Only one bill successfully passed, the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act. This year, Michele explained that failed bills will come back with the new assigned bills (Open-Captioned bill), (Ignition interlock). The new bills will be related to Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing: Co-Navigation Bill, LEAD-K Bill, and commission related to the Deaf and hard of hearing.

**Vice Chair’s Report:** Vacant

**Secretary’s Report: Meeting Minutes:** Vacant

**GODHH Acting Director Usherla DeBerry’s Report:**

- 1) Interpreter Licensure bill (last year- 2023) will collect the data and findings about the number of interpreters requests, average number of days that interpreters are used in the court system, average time needed to secure an interpreter, number of cases, etc. (requirement is postpone until January 2026)
- GODHH will be working with the deputy legislative officer- June Chung, and June report to Legislative Director, Eric Luedtke

- ◆ Interpreter Licensure Bill established SBSLI (State Board of the Sign Language Interpreters)
- ◆ Portal application is expected to open during Summer (June 2024)
- BH (Behavioral Health Administration) and University of Maryland recently hosted professional development, lecture series and workshops. They did that in January and February, the most recent one being in October. And we had Dr. Poorna Kushalnagar from Gallaudet University as the keynote speaker.
- The Governor's Office of Appointments, GOA sent out appointment notices to the SBSLI board. They were informed November 6th, the same time I was appointed. They have all been sworn in as of this time
  - ◆ Kate explained that the GOA had a late start with SBSLI because the SBSLI was supposed to be formally in October 1, 2023. Kate also explained about the regulation timeline for Interpreter Licensure supposedly to be on July 1, 2024 but will have an early time of period before the final approval and 30-day window for comments from the public. The publishing date of regulations will be July 1, 2024.
  - ◆ Kate: January 1st, 2025, is the first day that interpreters have to be licensed to work in Maryland.
  - ◆ Some members asked about the updates of K-12/Educational interpreters and Kate explained about the SBSLI will work on the process and most educational interpreters have EIPA, the educational interpreter proficiency assessment
  - ◆ Paige from MDSE offered to work with other state agencies for the data focusing and developing essentially a needs assessment that was looking at how many certified interpreters do we have in schools and how many non certified interpreters do we have, and then how many of those people would be interested in certification.
  - ◆ Usherla: SBSLI had a first meeting in December 2023 and second meeting in January 2024.
  - ◆ Kate: described the current ODHH staff structure of 3.5. The interpreter license will necessitate dedicated staff to implement the licensure and 3-4 additional staff will need to be created and hired. New position descriptions were drafted and included supporting ODHH Director to implement the licensure, screen and process qualified applicants, and initiate outreach throughout the state - state agencies, hospitals, law enforcement, public schools, employers and more; and to develop workshops for interpreters and consumers. TKate: GODHH and the Board hope to work on ASL videos on what those bills look like and the idea of what licensure looks like with disciplinary action.

- Kate: In the past 2 years, ODHH has been meeting with the Department of Human Services' Family Investment Administration (FIA) to provide input on improving social services access to deaf and hard of hearing consumers.

### **Old Business (Legislative Updates):**

- Michele and Kate: Dr. Larry Gray, the previous MACDHH member suggested that GODHH to collaborate with Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and utilizing RID as the part of grievance process. Kate explained that the state legislature's own grievance process is more strict than the RID grievance process. GODHH and the Board will be working to provide restorative justice and try to support the interpreters in resolving the processes. Some states already have enforcement and grievance procedures
- Kate: . A bill pertaining to Ignition Interlock, a device installed in vehicles by the MVA for DUI/DWI drivers. The device is not visible or loud enough for Deaf and hard of hearing drivers resulting in unnecessary penalties.
- A Senator intended to amend a bill to modify the interlock ignition program for other purposes. and the Deaf and hard of hearing community members took the advantage to amend the bill to include the accessible information
  - ◆ But we found out that the There's multi agency involvement here, which makes things a little bit nuanced.
  - ◆ Over the summer, ODHH and members of the deaf and hard of hearing community met with the Department of Transportation, the MVA, and discussed ways to improve the access. For instance, a letter is sent to a DUI recipient instructing them to take driver education classes and that they provide accommodations upon request.
  - ◆ f those internal remediations are not successful, they may resubmit new legislation
- Kate: The other failed bill: open captioning bill. There is one very powerful lobby, the National Association of Theater Owners, whose argument is revenue loss but did not provide data. . So we'll try again this year and see what happens with that.
- Kate: the new bill, the Co-Navigator bill, designates ODHH responsible for transportation support for DeafBlind individuals. Maryland lacks sufficient transportation infrastructure for the DeafBlind to navigate. .
- Kate: The LEAD-K bill will also be introduced this year. (Language Equity and Acquisition for Deaf Kids) children specifically to track language development milestones including ASL and visual tools (phonemes, Cued Speech). We currently have EHDI, the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention on state level to comply with federal law. . The bill focuses can be perceived as supplementary in what EHDI does not address. ,

- Another bill that failed last year was something that had to do with a fire alarm. Originally it was to improve what transpired in the high rise apartment fire that resulted in death and injuries in Silver Spring. A Deaf resident was fortunately alerted by a visiting friend who heard it. The Deaf community hoped to add an amendment requiring landlords to provide fire alarms to deaf and hard of hearing tenants.
- Currently in development, another bill with service dogs for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing individuals. So we're working with various chapters to provide consultation, different stakeholder groups.

### **Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary:**

Michele:

- The Chair, according to the bylaws, can only be filled by a Deaf individual who is a community member on the board.
- The Vice Chair can only be filled by a hearing individual who is a state agency representative.
- The Chair's main responsibility is facilitating our advisory council meetings. And the Vice Chair's responsibility is to act in proxy of the Chair if they are not available to facilitate said meetings.
- And the Secretary can be filled by anybody on the board.

The bylaws don't state if the candidates for any of those three positions have to have already served a certain time on the board. So technically the way that the bylaws are written, that means that even the new people can run today.

Break: 10 minutes at 2:57 PM

Chair: Norma Moran.

There is no vice chair and secretary.

Michele: The bylaws state that the incoming Chair can assume responsibility post elections and run the remainder of this meeting or the outgoing Chair continues with the meeting. At Norma's assent, Michele continued the meeting.

### **New Business:**

- Veronica: brought up concerns about HAAB, the Hearing Accessibility Advisory Board and its work on regulations to require hearing loops in buildings that receive state funding. The Chair retired and the Board has not met.

- Kate: Last meeting was sometime in early 2023 and will follow up with DGS or who is responsible for overseeing HAAB.
- Dianne: concern about the influx of immigrants arriving from other countries and nations with many deaf or hard of hearing children, some who are in their early teens who are language deprived. Services require insurance for hearing screening. Numbers are growing and the children spend months waiting.
- Usherla: the 504 plans temporarily at school
- ◆ Dianne: They cannot have services without a hearing screening, which is postponing their ability to receive services by months and months and months. Sometimes a year.
  - ◆ Payal: There is Maryland of the Insurance Administration (MIA) and can bring up the concerns about the immigrants insurance.
  - ◆ Payal: explained that there are resources coming from
    - the Maryland Office of Refugees and Asylees. That's one resource clearinghouse which is under the Department of Human Services,
    - the Governor's office of immigration? has been very active but they're working out some resource dissemination that is not based on statistics for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. They don't have that and are trying to collect some resources. Our GODHH website is currently being renovated, so we don't have those resources available at the moment but that's something we're going to be working on.
  - ◆ Dianne expressed her concerns about the public school system for K-12, specifically BIPOC children and the impact of language deprivation. The schools for the Deaf has family education programs but the public schools don't have family education programs. Dianne added that particularly parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children collaborate with the school system.
    - Dana: explained about her experience of journey being a parent of a Deaf child and the doctors. Dana, family support coordinator then case manager, worked with infants and toddlers. Dana fought for her son to be in MSD with the failed hearing tests with doctors. Dana emphasized that there are almost no resources for families to be involved with their childrens' lives and the public schools.
    - Usherla asked about the action item or action plan for the public school system and language development delayment. Dianna already wrote the proposal to set up a parent coaching group but it failed.

- Michele suggested that GODHH compile a list of mentors or parent mentors or people willing to serve as in a mentor capacity to new parents.
- ◆ Norma suggested that we have to study and figure out who is responsible for that, the state or the county, at what level, mainstream programs are county run. There are also mentoring programs already. Maryland Hands and Voices, for example, which collaborated with the EHDI program. EHDI program is under the Department of Health (Lauren)
  - Lauren explained about working on a grant which will expire on March 31st and already submitted the other grant for next iteration (5 years from April 1st) if approved.
    - Hand and Voices (Maryland and DC)
    - Sound Beginnings through the Maryland Chapter of AG Bell
  - Allysa expressed that Sound Beginning (Maryland Chapter of AG Bell) has a conflict of interest but emphasized that the mentorship for parents is important

## Announcements

- National Association of the Deaf (NAD) will be hosting meet and greet with NAD at Dave and Buster's on January 12th at 7 pm
- Norma introduced herself as the new Chair
  - Norma explained her seeking assistance from MCCR to resolve an f accessibility issue
  - Belief that a board member can provide resources to their community, if there are people going through struggles and they don't know where to go, MACDHH can share that information, and it's really nice to have the state agency representation here as well.
  - If you have a situation that comes up, feel free to discuss it in the group, including the state representatives as well
- Veronica thanked Kate for participating in one of the listening session panels in which Veronica is a chair of the commission for PG County for individuals with disabilities back in October.
- Kate: described MACDHH members as a useful resource for each other and ODHH to support the deaf and hard of hearing community and their loved ones.
  - Department of Aging has a program called the senior call check program within the state of Maryland but working to improve accessibility
  - Department of Labor for employment issues such as pension, learn about apprenticeship

- the Maryland Commission on of Civil Rights for a variety of constituency issues with discrimination.
  - Department of Health, related to the Office of Genetics and accessible behavioral health related issues.
  - Department of Transportation,for MVA access to written exams and driving tests,
  - Department of Housing and Community Development on low income resources and other programs,
  - State offices that have representation in MACDHH tend to have regular contact from Deaf and hard of hearing constituents, and we are here to be a resource for each of you.
- GODHH thanked Michele Westfall as the former chair of MACDHH

The meeting adjourned at 3:49 PM

The next MACDHH meeting will be on Friday, March 1, 2024.