



## State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Meeting

Wednesday, August 21, 2024

6:00-8:00 p.m.

*Via Zoom*

### **In Attendance**

#### *Board Members*

Susan Beaver, Community Member  
Ritchie Bryant, Maryland Association of the Deaf  
Paige Franklin, DeafBlind Representative  
Jacob Leffler, Community Member and Board Vice Chair  
Trudy Suggs, Community Member and Board Chair  
Leslie Puzio, Community Member

#### *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

#### *Others*

Heather Nelson, Assistant Attorney General  
Krystal Quinn, Assistant Attorney General  
Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General  
Jimmy Beldon, Janis Cole, Brianne Miller, and Anna Rose, Interpreters  
Community members (non-participating; viewers only)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Trudy Suggs at 6:10 p.m.

Leslie Puzio moved to approve the June 26, 2024, minutes and agenda as read. Susan Beaver seconded. CARRIED

### **Board Updates**

Chair Suggs shared that at the last meeting on June 26 the board entered a closed session on an emergency basis. While previous agendas had the line, "A portion of this meeting may be closed pursuant to Md. Code Ann., General Provisions Art. § 3-305(b)," the most recent agenda did not. As a result, the board recognizes that that the personnel matter discussed may not have risen to the level of emergency as perceived by the OMA, even if the need for such a closed session was not fully identified until during the meeting

Paige Franklin is now the DeafBlind representative on the SBSLI; we continue to wait for an update from the Office of Appointments for the Potomac Chapter of Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf representative seat.

**2024-06:** Ritchie Bryant moved to retroactively add motion numbers to all 2024 motions in previous meeting minutes. Paige Franklin seconded. CARRIED

The Board worked closely with the Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Office to finalize the regulations. The Board will review them tonight for approval. The regulations will then be published in the Maryland Register for public comment; the best way to stay updated currently on the regulations is to keep an eye on the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) website.

**2024-07:** Leslie Puzio moved that the Board share its letter regarding the Board's closed session meeting on June 26, 2024. Ritchie Bryant seconded. CARRIED

Chair Suggs then read the June 27, 2024, SBSLI letter sent to Pokuaa Owusu-Acheaw, the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff. The letter, which was copied to Director DeBerry, stated that the SBSLI passed a vote of no confidence in Director DeBerry. Reasons include the growing number of concerns about Director DeBerry's capabilities in the following areas: communication, transparency, staffing, deadlines and tasks, and integrity of the process. A copy of the letter is attached to these minutes. The State responded that it supported Director DeBerry and would continue to work with her.

The Board was forwarded many emails from the community just within the past 24 hours and has been responding to them. Chair Suggs apologized for the late responses since the ODHH did not forward them until yesterday. Furthermore, the Board received copies of letters from the Maryland Association of the Deaf and Potomac Chapter of Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf sharing concerns about Director DeBerry's performance and ODHH's lack of transparency.

The Board approved the seal as supplied by the State of Maryland.

Puzio updated the Board on her inquiry regarding the email issue with the Department of Information Technology (DOIT). It is her understanding, based on who she spoke with at DOIT, that GODHH submitted a request for email addresses for Puzio, Bryant, and Franklin, to DOIT but the request was denied since it was sent to the wrong department. To date, GODHH has not resubmitted it to the appropriate authorities. As a result, Puzio, Bryant, and Franklin continue to not have access to SBSLI files or emails.

### **GODHH Updates**

Director DeBerry introduced the new GODHH administrative assistant, Diamon Halliburton. Chair Suggs asked if she wanted to introduce Tanea Brown, the new outreach manager, but Director DeBerry declined.

Director DeBerry, Brown, and Leffler attended a website portal meeting; interpreters will apply via the State of Maryland's OneStop website. The meeting was to be held biweekly on Thursdays, but instead, the Board will be sent a link for review within two weeks of August 21, 2024.

Director DeBerry stated that the SBSLI-focused positions is the GODHH's responsibility, not SBSLI, and therefore the board does not need to be privy to the details of each position. She has open door hours on August 28, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for board members if they wish to communicate with her.

Bryant asked Director DeBerry about the \$100,000 SBSLI Fund allocated I by the statute, and what her plans were to communicate with the Board about the fund. Director DeBerry responded that she had responded to the question in the past and would not repeat herself. Chair Suggs inquired if Director DeBerry could at least let the board know where the money was; Director DeBerry again declined to answer.

Suggs then asked Director DeBerry if GODHH supported the law. Director DeBerry responded that the question was inappropriate. Suggs asked if GODHH was willing to work with the Board; the Board was and is very motivated to work with GODHH. Director DeBerry responded that the question was inappropriate and refused to answer.

Leffler asked AAG Sonnenstrahl if the open-door hours were in any way a violation of the Open Meetings Act. Sonnenstrahl said that he would be happy to send an advice memo regarding this.

### **Regulations Updates**

The Board received the revised regulations from the AAG's office with feedback and made further revisions. Vice Chair Jacob Leffler thanked the workgroups for their expedited responses to address the AAG's comments and suggestions.

**2024-08:** Leslie Puzio moved that the Board approves the current regulations as edited. Ritchie Bryant seconded. CARRIED

**2024-09:** Ritchie Bryant moved that the GODHH provides a quarterly report on the SBSLI Fund to the Board. Paige Franklin seconded. CARRIED

### **Bylaws**

Chair Suggs pointed out that there were two or three things within the bylaws that needed to be tweaked, such as changing "for" to "of" in the board name. Other items needing review include the mileage policy, which should probably read "travel" instead of "mileage," and a few other things that can wait until the next meeting.

**2024-10:** Paige Franklin moved to amend the bylaws by replacing "for" with "of" between *State Board* and *Sign Language Interpreters*. Ritche Bryant seconded. CARRIED

**Public Comments**

Chair Suggs has received numerous comments about the educational interpreter regulations, mostly from Frederick County Public Schools; all the emails have been responded to. There was a comment expressing concerns about interpreters who are senior citizens or close to retirement and how this law would affect them.

The Board also discussed briefly about ways to communicate with the community since the Board continues to have no way of directly communicating with the community other than via the ODHH website, which is administered by GODHH.

Considering today's responses from Director DeBerry, Bryant suggested that Chair Suggs call a meeting with all key individuals such as the GODHH, the Office of the Attorney General, and so forth, to discuss SBSLI concerns and ensure that everyone is on the same page. Suggs agreed and requested that the full board be present to ensure full transparency and communication.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Jacob Leffler*

June 27, 2024

Pokuaa Owusu-Acheaw, Deputy of Chief Staff  
Executive Office of the Governor  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Ms. Owusu-Acheaw,

Last night, the Maryland State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) passed a vote of no confidence in Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) Director Usherla DeBerry. As outlined during our June 20<sup>th</sup> meeting and in my June 24<sup>th</sup> letter, this is due to the growing number of concerns the Board has about Director DeBerry's capabilities in the following areas:

1. Communication
2. Transparency
3. Staffing
4. Deadlines & Tasks
5. Integrity of the process

A follow-up letter is being sent separately regarding the Board's concerns and needs.

The Board looks forward to an improved relationship with GODHH going forward.

Sincerely,

/s/

Trudy Suggs, CDI  
Chair, State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board

cc: Usherla DeBerry, GODHH Director