



State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Meeting

Wednesday, October 9, 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

Leslie Puzio, Community Member

Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH)

Usherla DeBerry, Director

Tanéa Brown, Outreach Interpreter Manager

Diamon Halliburton, Administrative Assistant

Laura Lugar, Executive Assistant

Others

Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General

Jimmy Beldon, Jerrin George, Brianne Miller, and Anna Rose, Interpreters

Community members (non-participating; viewers only)

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Jacob Lefflers at 6:02 p.m.

Ritchie Bryant moved to approve the August 28, 2024 and September 26, 2024 emergency meeting minutes as corrected, adding education for the full license to the list in the September meeting minutes. Leslie Puzio seconded. CARRIED

Board Updates

Vice Chair Leffler shared that Chair Trudy Suggs resigned from the board effective October 7, 2024. He thanked her for her service and affirmed the board's support for her service as well. An election is needed to appoint the new chair.

Ritchie Bryant moved to open the floor for nominations for the next chair. Paige Franklin seconded. CARRIED

Sue Beaver nominated Vice Chair Leffler for chair. Leslie Puzio seconded. CARRIED.

Ritchie Bryant nominated Leslie Puzio for vice chair. Paige Franklin seconded. CARRIED.

Chair Leffler and Vice Chair Puzio recognized the continuing need for two additional representatives for the board and for diverse representation. They encouraged the community members to nominate someone or to apply themselves through the GODHH website.

Chair Leffler shared that the town halls for website portal demonstrations took place at Community College Baltimore County (CCBC), Salisbury University, and a virtual town hall took place in the past month. He and Leslie Puzio attended the CCBC presentation and Chair Leffler and Sue Beaver attended the Salisbury presentation. Several members attended the virtual town hall as well. They received feedback from the community members about the portal as well as regulations. He emphasized the importance of receiving feedback on how the regulations impact interpreters in the State of Maryland.

GODHH Updates

Director Usherla DeBerry provided updates on various appointments and legislative matters. They made contact with the Appointment Office regarding the PCRID representative and the new community member. ODHH will be following up with PCRID on September 27th and awaiting a response by October 11th. The deputy chief of staff is involved in communications with the new Chair. The Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) approved an extension for the JCR report until October 18th. This is an annual report that the SBSLI is required to provide for oversight requirements, as well as for financial reasons.

The Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act has been enacted, and the ODHH is working with board members to define licensure requirements. Director DeBerry highlighted the creation of a registry for sign language interpreters and projected fiscal revenue for 2025. They also mentioned ongoing community engagement activities and the licensure program's key performance metrics.

Additionally, Director DeBerry discussed the process for proposed state regulations under the Governor's Office and provided updates on collaboration with legal advisors. Open Hours for community members and board members to ask questions were announced for October 24th and October 28th. The report concluded with gratitude for the opportunity to present updates.

Ritchie Bryant asked for a report from ODHH to ensure there are no other questions to ask. Director DeBerry agreed to do so.

MDAD Updates

Ritchie Bryant highlighted key points from the MDAD report. Since being sworn in in late June, he faced delays accessing the board drive, only gaining access three weeks ago, which hindered their ability to engage fully with board responsibilities. He recently developed a scope of work (SOW) for platform interpreting, covering areas like conference and theatrical interpreting, and will be collaborating with subject matter experts to draft new regulations. He will seek community input once the draft is approved.

He also expressed disappointment over Chair Suggs's resignation, citing concerns about transparency and communication issues within the board. He acknowledged barriers faced, including delays in getting a state email and access to essential documents, but expressed hope for improved communication and collaboration with the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He emphasized the importance of breaking down these barriers to fulfill his responsibilities effectively.

PCRID Updates

Chair Leffler provided updates on PCRID, noting that there is currently no representative for the board member position. He stated the Board has not heard from PCRID and plans to do so to ensure our Board is operating at full capacity. We are operating at 5 board members and should be at 7.

The working group has been focusing on various areas, including legal, medical, trilingual interpreters, and education.

Three new working groups have been established: one for mental health, one for DeafBlind interpreting, and one for platform interpreting. Paige Franklin will lead the DeafBlind group, Ritchie Bryant will lead the platform group, and Leslie Puzio will lead the mental health group.

The board has agreed to postpone finalizing speciality regulations until January 2026 per September meeting, with a goal to have them prepared by July 1, 2025. The timeline suggests completion around February or March 2025, depending on developments to allow for interpreters to know the regulations prior to needing to hold licensure.

Timelines for the Regulations

Chair Leffler clarified the dates for the regulations regarding specialized interpreting licenses. The finalized regulations will be posted by July 1, 2025, allowing interpreters time to review

them before they become effective on January 1, 2026. These regulations cover specializations such as legal, medical, behavioral health, DeafBlind, and platform interpreting.

General licensure and provisional licenses, including educational licenses, will take effect earlier, on January 1, 2025 with a grace period till July 1, 2025.

Chair Leffler also emphasized that any complaints related to licensure will be investigated thoroughly, with due process ensured before any license revocation, allowing interpreters to continue working during the investigation. The 3 month suspension is not right away after receiving a grievance. It is after a violation has been found valid.

Bryant emphasized that any grievance filed must be investigated, with consequences depending on the severity of the violation, based on the board's findings.

Chair Leffler mentioned that agency licenses will take effect on January 1, 2026, and turned the discussion over to Sue Beaver for updates on modifications to education-related licensure.

Sue Beaver provided two key updates based on community feedback:

1. The educational requirements for interpreters (such as needing a bachelor's degree, ITP, AA, or portfolio) have been removed.
2. The CEU requirement has been reduced from 2.0 to 1.0 every two years, with 0.5 CEUs specifically needing to be focused on PPO training.

Additionally, Beaver clarified that K-12 interpreters need either a national certification or an EIPA, not both.

The board agreed to reduce the number of required CEUs for specialized entities to align with RID requirements. The 11-hour CEU requirement has been reduced to match the number needed by RID.

Beaver clarified that RID CEUs, including the 1.0 CEUs in PPO, can be used to satisfy both the RID and state educational CEU requirements. Interpreters do not need to complete additional CEUs for the state if they have already met RID's requirements. Chair Leffler stated that GODHH will post regulations. These are not open for public comment yet. That will be later based on the process that Director DeBerry explained. This is to give the community an opportunity to see the regulations and become familiar with what is required so they can prepare for what they need.

Tanéa Brown explained that the release date for the website portal is uncertain due to recent regulation updates. The goal is to have applications available by January 1, with updates communicated through social media and the website. Bryant sought clarification on the portal timeline, and Brown confirmed that modifications to the portal are dependent on the newly approved regulations, but the regs themselves will be posted on the website. Tanea Brown

clarified that ODHH has been working with the DoIT center and had a contract for 12 weeks starting July 1st, 2024. The deadline is fast approaching. Ritchie Bryant stated he was unaware of this timeline with DoIT. Chair Leffler confirmed that was new information. Asked if public comments that lead to additional edits in the regulations - what will the next steps for that process and timeline be? Tanea Brown mentioned we would need to work with Director DeBerry on that.

Director DeBerry provided further details, explaining that they are working with a EY (contractor) and DoIT and need a 1 week extension to ensure the portal aligns with the regulations. Financial considerations are involved, and future modifications will require input from the new deputy director and board decisions.

Ritchie Bryant asked how much flexibility we have if we need to make more modifications. What and when (if so) are we “locked in”? Director DeBerry stated there is flexibility, but need to work with the Contractor. The new Deputy Director will oversee that part to best support the Board. Based on additional needs, funds will need to be moved over to cover the additional needs.

Brown explained the application process for licensure through the One Stop portal. Applicants will fill out the form, pay the fee, and submit documentation. Once reviewed, they will receive a confirmation email within 30 days. If issues arise, they can contact the Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). Brown clarified that users should register at onestop.md.gov or onestop.maryland.gov to create an account. Chair Leffler encouraged interpreters to set up accounts and be prepared for the application process. Brown also addressed potential technical issues and emphasized contacting GODHH if any problems occur.

The Board discussed plans for community outreach regarding draft regulations. They emphasized the importance of hosting town halls or information sessions to engage with the community before the end of the year. The idea of coordinating with the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to establish a timeline for these meetings was proposed.

Ritchie Bryant made a motion to host 3 townhalls before December. Paige Franklin seconded. Sue Beaver shared concerns that may be too many in a really busy time. Clarified if Bryant meant 3 townhalls. Ritchie Bryant confirmed he meant 3. Chair Leffler suggested 2 in person and 1 virtual. Chair thought that could be manageable. Bryant agreed that may be too aggressive. He shared that the SBSLI Board and Director DeBerry should determine the dates and locations so board isn’t bound by decisions. Board agreed to the process. Bryant stated maybe 2-3 townhalls. Sue Beaver shared 2 in person and 1 virtual may help those who can’t show up in person. All agreed good to share information with the community and be as transparent as possible. Bryant amended the motion to 2 in person and 1 virtual before December 2024. Sue Beaver 2nd. Motion passed.

suggested establishing a set number of town halls, possibly four or five, with a mix of in-person and virtual options to accommodate those unable to attend in person. There was consensus on aiming for three town halls before December, despite concerns raised about the ambitious timeline, given the busy nature of the upcoming months. The discussion concluded with a focus on finalizing the draft regulations for public comment and scheduling the town halls accordingly. Chair Leffler shared the board has received many questions from the community and thanked the community for their input and feedback. He shared that the Board is working to create a summary. Many questions were related to BEI and why the Board accepts that, what are the specialty license requirements, what do educational interpreters need? What does the grievance process look like? Will licenses be suspended for 3 months? Is VRI included in the regulations? What are the agency requirements? Concerns regarding CEUs. Chair Leffler promised to respond to all emails after the meeting.

Richie Bryant moved to close the meeting. Paige Franklin 2nd. Motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Paige Franklin