Maryland
STATE BOARD OF
SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Meeting
Wednesday, June 26, 2024
6:00-8:00 p.m.
Via Zoom

In Attendance
Board Members
Susan Beaver, Community Member
Ritchie Bryant, Maryland Association of the Deaf
Jacob Leffler, Community Member and Board Vice Chair
Trudy Suggs, Community Member and Board Chair
Leslie Puzio, Community Member
Kaylee Teixeira, Potomac Chapter Registry for the Deaf

Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH)
Usherla DeBerry, Director
Laura Lugar, Executive Assistant

Others
Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General
Tanea Brown Jac Cook, Gavin Gobble Baker, and Anna Rose, Interpreters
Community members (non-participating; viewers only)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Trudy Suggs at 6:00 p.m.

Kaylee Teixeira moved to approve the June 26, 2024, minutes as read. Susan Beaver seconded. CARRIED

Chair Trudy Suggs welcomed new board members Ritchie Bryant, representing the Maryland Association of the Deaf, and Leslie Puzio. The DeafBlind seat has been filled, but the board is awaiting further information from the Office of Appointments.

The board asked Director Usherla DeBerry a few questions. The first question concerned staffing plans for GODHH given that Director DeBerry let go of her communications and policy program managers, and whether or not GODHH would have adequate staffing to begin processing applications once the application portal opened.

Director DeBerry responded that the Office would hire an emergency executive assistant and an interpreter coordinator/manager. The rest, such as the outreach coordinator, deputy director, and compliance officer would be revisited after the second week of July. She emphasized that this

was a state-level decision and that the Office is adhering to the state's instructions. The positions will be advertised in July, although the two positions recently mentioned are already being filled. Director DeBerry then apologized to the board for the lack of transparency or communication, and again emphasized that this was in the hands of the state.

Chair Suggs reiterated the importance of communication with the board and providing full administrative support. The board expressed frustration that it had worked for a few months without staffing support and that there was a great need for someone with institutional knowledge who was also knowledgeable about state functions. Furthermore, the lack of support from the Office resulted in missing the July 1st deadline for publishing the regulations, which was to be drafted by the Office rather than the Board.

Chair Suggs then followed up on the board's May 15th request for an organizational chart and role delineation, information about communications, and budget. The Office's response to the budget request was that the board "does not need to know more about the budget." Director DeBerry clarified that she was not being resistant, but rather, was trying to understand why the board needed to know about the budget. She added that the Governor's Office of Financial Administration (GOFA) was already working on that, but that she had nothing to share yet.

Chair Suggs requested the Office's commitment that the Board would get the requested information without difficulty. The next concern was that SBSLI does not have a vehicle to communicate with the community about its progress, since everything is being funneled through GODHH. The board requested to form an email list, but was denied. The board requested an sbsli@maryland.gov email, but was denied. All updates to the website are not posted quickly, nor is there any way for the board to access the website. The board cannot post to social media, and all meeting notices have not been posted in due time despite the board's advance notices to the Office. All emails are funneled through gov.odhh@maryland.gov and discretely forwarded to the board.

Director DeBerry responded that these were issues with the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), and that she would follow up on that. She added that state-level boards do not typically use email to communicate and that having individual email addresses were out of budget, so she would have to look into that further.

Chair Suggs stated that there was a major concern from the community: that the Office continues to hire uncertified interpreters, including two of today's working interpreters. The Board has received numerous complaints from the community, which was shared with Director DeBerry before tonight's meeting, but there was no response. Director DeBerry stated that there were scheduling issues, but that the Office was not sending uncertified interpreters. Chair Suggs reminded Director DeBerry that two of the four interpreters tonight were uncertified. She then requested that ODHH not hire any more uncertified interpreters for ODHH or SBSLI activities or events.

Concerns were brought up about the confusion surrounding the Office's late announcements and mistaken links to tonight's meeting. Chair Suggs will develop a protocol going forward for how SBSLI meetings to ensure the Office does not do this again.

Chair Suggs reminded Director DeBerry of the importance of understanding the statute that SBSLI is bound to, and that the Office must provide administrative support. She also encouraged the Office to keep in mind that the board members are volunteers as opposed to Office staff, who are paid. Director DeBerry provided some clarification on the web portal progress and the budgetary aspects of the web portal.

Reports
There was no report from either the Maryland Association of the Deaf or the Potomac Chapter of Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf.

Work Groups Report
Vice Chair Jacob Leffler thanked people who served on the workgroup:

- *Agencies:* Kaylee Teixeira, Kate O'Regan ,and Carolyn Boykins
- *Education*: Susan Beaver, David Alianello, Amy Brooks, Renee Gordon, Beth Ann Monn, Tanshea Saint Louis, and Selma Simms
- *Legal*: Jacob Leffler, Tony Barraza, Tina Joyner, and Debi Shostak along with input from Carla Mathers
- *Medical*: Trudy Suggs, Tanshea Saint Louis, Thomas Burgess, Jaime Holloway, Shelby Abdilah, Susan Galdieri, and Jason Conrad
- *Trilingual*: Tony Barraza, Monica Gallego, Su Isakon, and Fidel Torres

Apologies go to any individual not named. The Board is still working on the DeafBlind, behavioral health, and platform interpreting regulations and we are looking for more people to volunteer; interested parties may email gov.odhh@maryland.gov.

Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Ethan Sonnenstrahl explained that the process to add anything new to the regulations will be the same process as we are currently undergoing. This likely will take between two and three months.

Regulations
The draft regulations were reviewed. Discussion took place on the revocation process, and agreed that there would be a minimum of three months, including the appeal process. However, the individual who is being investigated cannot have the license revoked until after the decision has been made on the complaint.

Investigation Process
Discussion then took place on the investigation process. AAG Sonnenstrahl pointed out that the Board holds the responsibility of all investigations. The board may also delegate that responsibility to the Office of Administrative Hearings, and he will send Chair Suggs information on that.

Waiver Process
The Board agreed that there will be no waiver for any out-of-state interpreters who are already licensed elsewhere. The next matter discussed was establishing a grace period. Given the

Office's lack of outreach efforts and staffing, along with the regulations still undergoing revisions, it would be beneficial to the interpreting community to have a six-month grace period for all applications and licensures that ends on July 1, 2025.

Agencies
AAG Sonnenstrahl is still conducting research on the board's authority over agencies, and will inform the board.

Fee Structure
The Board reviewed and discussed the fee structure, and agreed to update the definition for "agency" to include owners of LLCs and/or nonprofit organizations that provide interpreting service. The agency fee was determined at $200, while sole proprietors will have their agency fees waived.

2024-02: Ritchie Bryant moved that the Board approves the regulations as discussed and with the understanding that the AAG office may make revisions. Leslie Puzio seconded. CARRIED

Emergency Executive Session
2024-03: Ritchie Bryant moved that the Board goes into an emergency executive session to discuss personnel issues. Leslie Puzio seconded. CARRIED

The Board went into an emergency executive session at 8:00 p.m. and exited the session at 8:55 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 p.m.