

§ 9-2404. Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH) - September 12, 2025 (Crownsville, MD)

MACDHH Council Members Present: Vice Chair: Mark Tesoro

Yolanda Dockery, John Serrano, Dianna Yamada, Cassidy Brooks Flagg, Edwin Martinez, Dr. Daniel Koo, Maia Williams, Kathleen Farnsworth Kramer

Absent: Paige Bradford(MDSE), Tony Bridges(MDOT), Cleveland L. Horton II, (Civil Rights Comm), Kirten Patterson (MDL), Allegra Hollins(DHCD), Dana Hill(Parent of a Deaf Child), Edwin Martinez JR(Knowledge/Expertise Deaf-Blind Individual), Bo Byun(Citizen with w/ Hearing Loss), Norma Moran(Citizen with Hearing Loss)

Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) Staff Members: Director Usherla DeBerry, Tanéa Brown, and Diamon Halliburton.

Call to order: 2:01 PM

Meeting Minutes: The board meeting included a specific agenda item to approve the minutes from the June 7th meeting. Mark Tesoro initiated the discussion by asking if everyone had reviewed the minutes, especially since Usherla had distributed a lot of information. After confirming there were no proposed edits, John Serrano made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Cleveland Horton. The motion was passed unanimously, and the minutes from June 7th were officially approved.

Interim Chair Report:

Mark Tesoro, the interim chair, opened the meeting by briefly discussing his role and the need for a Deaf chairperson in accordance with the bylaws. He encouraged members to consider stepping into the chair position while he continues to lead until someone is elected. Mark emphasized how Usherla and her team handle the majority of the work.

The next meeting was confirmed for December 5th, with a discussion regarding the frequency of meetings. The group agreed to keep the current schedule of quarterly meetings, as outlined by the bylaws, and a formal motion was made and seconded to confirm this.

Mark shared updates regarding ongoing efforts to gather data on Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Maryland, highlighting challenges in obtaining accurate statistics. He mentioned an upcoming report from Johns Hopkins that will update existing data.

The conversation shifted to goals and strategies developed for Deaf and hard of hearing seniors, encompassing accessibility, social inclusion, data collection, and equitable access to healthcare and long-term care.

Mark introduced the “Longevity Ready Maryland” initiative, a ten-year plan aimed at improving services for aging individuals, especially those with disabilities. He outlined the alignment between the goals of the initiative and the needs of the Deaf and hard of hearing community, expressing excitement over potential collaboration.

Bo Byun thanked Mark for sharing vital information about agency initiatives and the importance of awareness among the members. The meeting concluded with a transition to Usherla's report, which was expected to include updates on bills and other activities within the office.

Vice Chair's Report: N/A

GODHH Director Usherla DeBerry's Report:

Usherla DeBerry opened the board meeting for the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by welcoming all board members and guests. She expressed her gratitude for their involvement and support in the community's initiatives and the office's ongoing journey.

Usherla presented recent proposals submitted to the Maryland General Assembly that are aimed at improving services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

The board received approval from the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Licensure (SBSLI) for various initiatives that would enhance interpreter services.

There was a discussion about increasing the number of interpreters on the board to ensure a more representative and effective decision-making process.

The Potomac Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PCRID) has decided to withdraw its name from the SBSLI. This decision is linked to concerns about maintaining their 501(c)(3) compliance status.

The board addressed the "grandfathering" clause, which allows experienced interpreters who have been working without certification to continue their roles under certain conditions.

They emphasized the need to establish clear criteria for these individuals to maintain quality in the interpreter services provided.

Usherla highlighted the success of recent virtual town halls, which were organized to gather community feedback, particularly from rural areas where access to services is limited.

During these sessions, participants voiced concerns regarding the shortage of certified interpreters and the barriers they face in accessing interpretation services.

The office is actively working with states like New York and Minnesota to share best practices in accessibility, especially concerning elections and other public events.

These collaborations aim to improve overall standards and practices in providing interpreting services.

The board is focused on obtaining updated demographic data regarding the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population in Maryland. This information is crucial for informing governmental policy and improving resource allocation.

Current efforts are aimed at collecting accurate data to replace outdated statistics from 2016.

Partnerships are being established with institutions such as Johns Hopkins to gather and analyze data while also addressing the needs of Deaf individuals within various environments, including healthcare.

Ongoing meetings with the Jessup prison are facilitating discussions about the needs of incarcerated individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

A new Deaf Access Commission has been formed to specifically focus on increasing support and resources for both Deaf individuals and the hard-of-hearing community in Maryland.

This commission aims to assess current gaps in services and create actionable plans to address those needs

Usherla informed the board about the upcoming reelection campaign for the governor and noted ongoing efforts to secure funding and develop a budget that supports the office's initiatives moving forward.

The meeting concluded with an open floor for questions. Dianna Yamada raised concerns regarding the evaluation of non-certified interpreters and the potential challenges surrounding their inclusion in the workforce.

Bo Byun highlighted the importance of also considering individuals who are approaching retirement and how their experience can be utilized within the community.

GODHH Outreach Interpreter Manager Tanéa Brown Report:

Tanéa Brown provided an update on the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, mentioning that they are currently awaiting public comments regarding regulations, which have been extended until the 30th. The Department of State is also in the process of finalizing documentation. Once approved, this information will be made available on their website.

In Maryland, discussions are underway for a one-stop portal to help interpreters and contractors gather necessary information. Provisional licenses were initiated in July, and educational licenses followed in September. Currently, focus is on agency licensing, with hopes to be fully operational by October 1.

Usherla DeBerry clarified that the board is working on substantial regulatory changes, which will be revisited after the public comment period. The next steps include publishing the second part of the regulations in the Maryland Register, with further community input expected.

The full launch of the updated system is not expected until January 1, 2026. Recently, a "Lunch and Learn" session on American Sign Language was held, and a NIC BEI study group meets monthly to support interpreters preparing for certification. Continuing education units on deafblindness are also scheduled for January 31.

GODHH Administrative Assistant Report:

Hello, everyone. I'm going to use my voice today to save you from my slow signing. I have a few important updates to share, and I'll be quick since I know we're short on time and you're eager to hear our wonderful presenters.

First, I want to discuss the departmental submissions, particularly for our state agencies. Thank you all for being here today. We have some submissions posted on our website as of May 1 this year, including those from the Maryland Department of Aging, the Maryland Department of Disabilities, and the Maryland Department of Health. If you haven't checked it out yet, I'll reach out again to keep you informed and ensure that the public has access to this information.

Next, I want to talk about a committee I participated in—the Maryland Social Work Group for Licensure. Our goal was to ensure accessible test-taking opportunities for everyone. We submitted our recommendations on June 30 and are now awaiting a response from the General Assembly. We want to guarantee that those who need accommodations for test-taking have that opportunity available to them.

I also support the workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing. We submitted a recommendation on July 1, and we're now waiting for feedback from the General Assembly regarding the need for additional support for the Commission on Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing.

Regarding our annual reports for 2023 and 2024, as you may know, most of our staff is fairly new, which has led to some data loss during the transition. The 2023 annual report is finished and will be posted on our website shortly, as well as submitted through the proper channels. The 2024 report is still in progress, but we hope to have it online before the 2025 report is due.

I'd like to mention our social media as well. Due to some recent changes, it's possible that you're following the wrong account. Our handle is MDGOVODHH—MDGOVODHH across all social media platforms.

On August 3, I attended an event hosted by an environmental group for the Deaf that focuses on supporting the environment. They celebrated their recent graduates who completed a six-

week program in the wilderness. It was inspiring to hear their stories and see how nature can connect Deaf individuals.

I have also completed the "Managing for Results" initiative. You may have received an email from me asking for specific data related to each agency. This request is different from the departmental submissions, as it focuses more on numbers. If you haven't responded yet, please do so as I'm quite patient and will follow up.

I've already submitted the required data, but there is still room for changes, so if you haven't sent your information to me yet, you still can.

Lastly, I am managing finances for our office, particularly related to interpreter tests scheduled for January 2026. My goal is to ensure we have accurate data regarding the fees for the new one-stop portal and the interpreters paying for their licenses. Documenting all this data is crucial, and it's something I'm currently working on.

Special Topic:

Dr. Noe Turcios

Dr. Noe Turcios from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) provided an overview of two key services offered for individuals with disabilities: Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

He explained that DORS is a state agency focused on helping people with disabilities, including those who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind, achieve independence and self-sufficiency primarily through employment-related services. Pre-ETS targets students aged 14-21 and offers five key services: job exploration counseling, work readiness training, and work-based learning experiences to help youth transition from school to work.

For VR, eligibility includes various disabilities impacting job performance, and those receiving SSI or SSDI may automatically qualify. DORS follows an order of selection for services, prioritizing individuals with severe disabilities. Turcios also discussed the support structure, which includes Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf who assist clients in creating individualized plans for employment.

He emphasized the importance of accessibility, encouraging individuals to seek assistance and reminding them that DORS services are typically provided at no cost, depending on individual circumstances. Turcios concluded by inviting questions and providing brochures for further information.

Throughout, there were interactive discussions, including a personal story highlighting the lack of awareness some individuals have regarding the services that DORS offers, emphasizing the need for better outreach and education within the community.

Lindsay Dunn

Lindsay Moeltsi Dunn shares insights from his experiences as a Black Deaf man, emphasizing the dual challenges of navigating both racism and audism in America. He reflects on his background, having grown up in South Africa during apartheid and later moving to the U.S. He discusses the complexities of his identities and how they shape his interactions in different spaces.

Dunn highlights the struggles of Black Deaf individuals, from facing societal stereotypes to the difficulty of obtaining education and support. He recalls his experiences at Gallaudet University, where he worked in diversity and community relations, advocating for equal opportunities for marginalized students. Dunn stresses the importance of community support, particularly from Black educators who understand the unique challenges faced by Black Deaf students.

He discusses the impact of historical figures like Andrew Foster, who helped establish educational opportunities for Deaf Africans, illustrating that success is possible despite systemic barriers. Dunn calls for a recognition of Black pedagogy and the importance of mentorship and community in helping students succeed.

The speech emphasizes continual negotiations in life and the need for resilience in overcoming societal challenges. Dunn concludes with a commitment to fighting against the systemic issues that create barriers, advocating for a more equitable environment for future generations.

Old Business: N/A

New Business: N/A

Announcements:

Kathi Cramer from Maryland Deaf Access announced a special AA forum in January, which will be interpreted in three languages: French, Spanish, and English. Spanish business cards are available for outreach to the Latino community.

AA Resources: The AA textbook is accessible in ASL on tablets used in jails, receiving good feedback for usage. ASL video podcasts can be found on AA Grapevine's website (grapevine.org) and AA.org.

Dr. Daniel Koo provided an update that construction has begun at the Maryland Deaf Community Center in Frederick. Those interested can subscribe to their newsletter for project updates.

Dr. Koo invited attendees to a governmental tournament scheduled for September 29th.

Bo Byun announced a national Pickleball event happening over four days (Friday to Sunday) and encouraged participation.

Meeting adjourned at 4:40 PM