



**Board Meeting**  
**December 16, 2025**  
**7:30 PM**  
**Via Zoom**

**In Attendance**

*Board Members*

Jacob Leffler, Chair and MDAD Representative  
Leslie Puzio, Vice Chair and Community Member  
Juliana Apfel, Community Member  
Susan Beaver, Community Member  
Nancy Gaskins, Community Member  
Jim Skjeveland, PCRID Representative  
Vacant, DeafBlind Representative

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

Usherla DeBerry, Director  
Diamon Halliburton, Administrative Assistant

*Others*

Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General  
Anna Rose and Gavin Gobble Baker, Interpreters  
Community members (attendees; viewers only)

The meeting was called in order by Chair Jacob Leffler at 7:32 p.m.

Chair Leffler welcomed all board members and each board member did a self introduction of name and background descriptions. Chair Leffler also discussed the meeting protocols.

Vice Chair Leslie Puzio moved to approve the agenda as read. Board Member Juliana Apfel seconded. CARRIED

Board member Susan Beaver moved to approve the minutes for 7.10.2025, 8.05.2025, 8.14.2025, 8.27.2025, 9.02.2025, and 11.18.2025 as read. Board Member Jim Skjeveland seconded. CARRIED.

*Board Updates*

Chair Leffler reported on behalf of the Board. The regulations have been worked on by the Board. The Board approved the regulations and posted them on SBSLI's website. The Board is now dealing with a

pause implemented by the Governor's Office due to possible changes with the legislation that if any would go through during legislative session 2026. The Board has two representatives, Vice Chair Puzio and Board Member Apfel on the Governor's Workgroup and the Board appreciates their time and work for this workgroup.

We will also be responding to the Financial Hardship Application that is being overseen by GODHH.

We will later revisit alternative pathways criteria after the Governor's Office Workgroup for SBSLI and possibly after legislative session 2026.

### *GODHH Updates*

Director Usherla DeBerry reported that GODHH had a meeting recently with the Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Board are able to view our reports online when the minutes are available. GODHH will continue our support related to logistics for SBSLI and Governor's Office Workgroup for SBSLI (hosted 3rd meeting this week).

The Workgroup for DDBHH Chair, Dr. Leo Yates is setting up an internal meeting on December 22, 2025 and December 23, 2025 as a back update to update the workgroup members on their recommendations that they sent to the General Assembly. They will also be hosting a Town Hall and the date will be announced soon.

GODHH is doing programs to support interpreters studying for their certification such as Study Table and ASL Club. Locations for study groups are under review. The participants voted and preferred Laurel as a location and due to the need for confirmed space, it is being relocated to the Columbia area for the year 2026 at Ellicott City 50+ Center & Fitness Center in Ellicott City. They also provide Virtual Study Tables. Each study table expected to have someone that is partially certified - passed written exam or fully certified passed written and performance. The space for the Study Table is expected to expand across the state. The Study Table group scheduled in Annapolis on Saturday, December 13, 2024 due to the Governor's Holiday Open House event to give the study table members an opportunity to attend the event. The timeline and locations will be published when finalized. They will continue to share the importance of why we need interpreters and learning ASL, embracing the culture and shortage of interpreters and we will continue this avenue. If you know of interpreters interested in attending the study group, can contact us internally (to email us and sign up). The study group is for hearing and deaf that are interested. The study table also includes Deaf and Hearing people. This is tailored to marginalized interpreters. Programs are announced on our website and social media. Programs may be added to SBSLI's agenda at the next scheduled meeting.

### *Updates about MDAD, PCRID, and Governor's Office Workgroup for SBSLI*

Chair Leffler as the MDAD Representative, shared that MDAD is concerned about the pause with the regulations and would like to move forward with the interpreter licenses. They are not clear why the pause by the Governor's Office occurred.

PCRID Representative Skejeveland shared with welcome input from Member Apfel that PCRID has moved forward from an interim board to a permanent and they are ready to work on supporting the requirement for interpreter licenses.

Vice Chair Puzio and Member Apfel shared that the Governor's Office Workgroup has met three times on December 1, 8 and 15, 2025 to date. The members as follows:

1. Laura Gyamfi, Senior Policy Advisor
2. Hannah Dier, Deputy Legislative Officer
3. Juliana Apfel, SBSLI
4. Leslie Puzio, SBSLI
5. Tina Joyner, MDAD
6. Megan George, Deaf Community Member
7. Tiasha Bera, Deaf Community Member
8. William "Bill" Millos, Deaf Community Member
9. Jake Whitaker, MHA
10. Pamela Ortiz, Judiciary
11. Mary Pat Fannon, PSSAM
12. Sam Mathias, MABE
13. Jason Conrad, Interpreter Coordinator for the Frederick Health Hospital
14. Dave Coyne, Language Access and Inclusion Director of Gateway Interpreting
15. Caitlin Comstock, Certified Hearing Interpreter
16. Betty Colonomos, Certified Hearing Interpreter

Advisory Members:

1. Senator Nancy King
2. Delegate Heather Bagnall
3. Ethan Sonnestrahl, Assistant Attorney General
4. Usherla DeBerry, GODHH

Additional Attendee:

1. Jennifer Katz, Deputy Legal Counsel, Governor's Office

### *Financial Hardship Form*

Director DeBerry reported the makeup of what will be on the form. The form will be on OneStop.

There is a sign language interpreters fund (funds are generated, accumulated from the interpreter licenses fees). Feedback received, 1) Leave which of the following best describes you, question blank, allow the applicant to fill in by adding a paragraph setting. 2) Provide an option for ASL friendly using the form fostering bilingual. GODHH will have a disclaimer in the instructions with this being an option. OneStop currently does not support uploading videos.

The Board provided feedback and inputs to the form.

### *Other Criteria Taskforce*

The Board discussed the other criteria or alternative pathways taskforce that the Board approved earlier in the year. It was agreed that it will be co-led by Chair Leffler and Board Member Skjveland. This will be a taskforce to work on developing the scope of work. Names were collected under former Board Member Ritchie Bryant.

Vice Chair Puzio moved for the Board to go into closed session for legal advice from the Assistant Attorney General (AAG) regarding the Governor's Office Workgroup. Seconded by Board Member Apfel. **CARRIED.**

Member Nancy Gaskin moved for the Board to come out of the closed session.. Seconded by Board Member Beaver. **CARRIED.**

Member Beaver moved that the Board send a letter of response to the Governor's Office and sponsors of the bill on the Board's perspectives. Seconded by Board Member Apfel. **CARRIED.**

Chair Leffler thanked the Board, GODHH, AAG, and interpreters for their work and thanked the participants for watching the Board meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:22 PM.