



Board Meeting
February 19, 2026
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
Jim Skjeveland, PCRID Representative
Vacant, DeafBlind Representative

Absent: Nancy Gaskins, Community Member

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

Usherla DeBerry, Director
Diamon Halliburton, Administrative Assistant

Others

Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General
Anna Hayes and Christina Whitehouse-Suggs, Interpreters
Community members (attendees; viewers only)

The meeting was called in order by Chair Jacob Leffler at 7:30 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 Updates

Chair Leffler reported on behalf of the Board. The Chair provided an update on meetings with interpreters, stakeholders, and members of the Deaf community regarding pending legislation affecting the Board. The Board has consulted with the Assistant Attorney General to ensure compliance with the Open Meetings Act when discussing the proposed legislation.

The Chair reported that the DeafBlind representative position remains vacant, with the appointment process expected to continue following the conclusion of the legislative session. The importance of restoring a full Board membership was emphasized.

An update was provided on staffing, noting that the Deputy Director and Compliance Officer positions are expected to be filled by June 30, 2026, to support the Board's work. The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is continuing to coordinate Board activities, while work on regulations has been temporarily postponed pending legislative action. In the meantime, efforts are focused on developing the application process and ensuring stakeholder alignment.

Following the legislative session, ODHH plans to work closely with the Division of State Documents to finalize and expedite the regulatory process.

Updates about Senate Bill 645 and House Bill 1192

The Board discussed about the new language that are proposed in the bill. The Board will expand from 7 to 11 with 2 non-voting members. It also added the requirement of the reporting about the speciality regulations if the Board wants to establishes one and consult with stakeholders. The regulations must be published by December 31, 2026 and the licensure begins January 1, 2027.

The Board discussed what the Board's position on this because there is a hearing next week on the bill. The Board discussed the community's perspective from Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, interpreter's community, and stakeholders' perspectives. The Board shares the same concerns and are not comfortable with the current amendments. The Board would like to make amendments to the bill.

Vice Chair Puzio moved that the Board write a letter in opposition to the current bill amendments as written. Seconded by Juliana Apfel. **CARRIED**

Chair Leffler will testify in person as well and the Board Chair will discuss with AAG in terms of the language to ensure that we are following the procedure.

Jim Skjeveland moved that the Chair meets with the Governor's Appointment's office to get a better understanding of the Appointment Process and to ensure that we have a language proficiency check before someone is appointed to the Board. Seconded by Juliana 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.