**Georgia Commission on Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons**

**Thursday, December 11, 2014**

**1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

**Atlanta Speech School**

**3160 Northside Parkway, NW**

 **Atlanta, GA 30327**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present: Ms. Mary Reed, Ms. Laura Sarsfield, Dr, Helena Solodar, Mr. Comer Yates**

**Members Absent: Mr. Chuck Leavell, Ms. Lee Ann Meadows**

**Staff Present: Ms. Katherine Cadena**

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Solodar at 1:39 p.m.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the September 12th meeting. The motion was seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Solodar welcomed Commission members and guests to the meeting.

Ms. Shetera Reeves, Program Manager with the Georgia Lions Lighthouse, spoke about their pediatric hearing program. It covers children birth through 19 years old and is available for those not covered by PeachCare for Kids, Right from the Start Medicaid, or private insurance and whose families make less than 400% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. One parent must be a Georgia resident for at least one year. The program covers up to two new digital hearing aids, nine appointments with an audiologist and either six or 12 ear molds depending on hearing loss. Sliding fee scale ranges from $300 to $1075 and children can reapply every three years. Applications will soon be available online at [www.lionslighthouse.org](http://www.lionslighthouse.org).

Dr. Solodar discussed the Let Georgia Hear proposal by Kelly Jenkins, which would mandate insurance companies to cover the cost of hearing aids in Georgia. Representative Penny Houston is backing the proposal. The proposal is expected to be added to another bill presented on the voting ballot in 2016 as a constitutional amendment. Mr. Yates asked how that strategy was determined and asked what other ways the Commission can support passage. Dr. Solodar stated she would send the current language of the proposed bill to Commission members for review. Mr. Yates expressed his gratitude for all that Rep. Penny Houston has done for the proposal.

Dr. Kelly Hermanns from the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH), Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Intervention program (UNHSI) discussed program updates. She stated Dr. Tammy Uehlin has resigned from the program and she (Hermanns) has assumed Dr. Uehlin’s duties, in addition to her responsibilities until the position is filled. She is writing for a grant continuation. A curriculum for audiologists will be developed, which will have some best practices listed and added protocol and guidelines. There is a mentorship program. One audiologist is on board so far and two more are interested. They are continually trying to improve documentation of private interventionists for those who fail hearing screening. Mr. Yates asked if there were any adverse actions for audiologists who didn’t perform best practices. Dr. Hermanns replied no, The blood spot card legislation passed and is officially on the Newborn Screening panel as of June 2, 2014. But facilities don’t have to be officially compliant until July 1, 2015. New cards were released to hospitals in October. There is a video on the Hands and Voices website to improve screener communication that shows them the kind of impact they have on parents and what’s said to families. Ideally, education on this should start prenatally. There is a 100 Babies Project meeting on January 12th with Dr. Fitzgerald, Commissioner for the Georgia Department of Public Health. There is a Georgia Academy of Audiology meeting on February 5th at the Georgia Tech conference center where Dr. Hermanns will give a brief presentation. It is now mandated that all hospitals screen babies before discharge. Now physicians and audiologists are doing follow up screens and diagnostic testing on babies that do not pass both, pass and refer to have to be reported back. Before it was only refers.

Dr. Solodar discussed Adopt a Band. It was mentioned that some band directors did not believe in ear protection, and didn’t believe their students would wear it. Mr. Yates said that information should be reported to the school principals. Dr. Solodar would ask for follow up from the group heading up the Adopt a Band initiative now. It was recommended that the initiative members meet with the governing body of the Georgia High School Association that conducts band competitions and to whom all the schools are held accountable.

Ms. Reed discussed the upcoming job seminar for employers, Untapped Talent. Eight members serve on the committee. Some from GACHI, and the Georgia Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (GVRA). It will be held on March 6th at Georgia Perimeter College.

Dr. Solodar stated the 2015 meeting dates are as follows: February 24th, May 19th, August 25th, and November 17th. Dr. Solodar’s last meeting will be May 19th. The two main positions for the Commission available now are a parent of a child who is hard of hearing or a business person associated with doing business as a teacher or an audiologist or a professional who is working the hard of hearing.

Ms. Sarsfield spoke on Georgia in the Loop. Dr. Sturkins is now using social media to promote hearing loop advocates. There’s good information on her FaceBook page, such as webinars studies, etc. AG Bell had an article about induction loops on their publication this fall. All are welcome to attend the meeting and join the committee. Meetings are held at 6:00 in the evenings. Six loops have been installed in houses of worship. Two of them have multiple loops installed. The United States Supreme Court was looped this summer.

Mr. Yates discussed Georgia Pathway. He stated there is funding to hire a project manager. Pathway is a multi agency public and private partnership led by the Georgia Department of Education to ensure every child in Georgia who is deaf or hard of hearing can read on level by eight years old. The Cox Foundation has provided a very generous grant to the Atlanta Speech School to create an online campus for professional development of teachers of children birth to eight years old. The Pre-K preschool teacher course work is completed and birth to three is currently in development. Those courses will include training for teachers that will give them the capacity to have their children who are deaf or hard of hearing on grade level reading trajectory. There will be support for both teachers who work with children developing listening and spoken language and for teachers who are developing grade level reading through American Sign Language.

Dr. Solodar asked for assistance with creating a FaceBook page or a Twitter feed for the Commission. Ms. Reed stated she could assist. She also asked for some names for the Commission.

With no further business, a motion was presented to end the meeting. The motion was seconded and passed. The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 24, 2015 from 1:30 until 4:30 with the location to be determined.