

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

**Auditory Verbal Center
1901 Century Blvd NE #20
Atlanta, GA 30345**

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Ms. Jennifer Clark, Dr. Chip Goldsmith, Ms. Kelly Jenkins, Dr. Amy Lederberg, Mr. Jim Lynch, Dr. Beth Lytle, Mr. Jimmy Peterson, Ms. Ellen Rolader, Ms. Dana Tarter, Ms. Deshonda Washington and Mr. Comer Yates

Members Absent: Dr. Jiovanne Hughart

Staff Present: Ms. Katherine Cadena

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Yates.

Mr. Yates thanked Debbie Brillong, Executive Director of the Auditory Verbal Center, for hosting the meeting. Guests and members introduced themselves. New Commission member Chip Goldsmith stated he is a neuro-otologist practicing in Savannah and has an interest in developing affordable hearing solutions from cochlear implants to various hearing aid platforms. He has taught several physicians how to perform ear surgery. New Commission member Amy Lederberg works at Georgia State University and conducts research on the development of language and reading for deaf and hard of hearing children and created the intervention that is used across Georgia. Mr. Yates stated significant planning and representation has gone into the design of the newly-configured Commission. Mr. Peterson asked how the state decided which interpreting agencies received the contract for providing interpreters because there were issues with the previous meeting and this meeting in the selection of interpreters. Ms. Cadena stated that the Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) was responsible for the procurement process. DOAS representatives met with stakeholders from other state agencies, of which she was one. The stakeholders evaluated the merits of each agency, however DOAS assigned points for both technical expertise and price and more points were awarded for price than for quality of services. Some state agencies have implemented supplemental contracts however, the Department of Human Services, which is Commission is administratively attached to, has not allowed the creation of a supplemental contract. However, Ms. Cadena received permission, shortly before this meeting, to use another vendor for all future meetings and she will work with vendors who have a proven expertise in providing competent services in a timely manner and has the intention of providing consistent interpreters requested from the Commission members who rely on those services. Mr. Peterson stated that DOAS made decisions to execute contracts with agencies that are not familiar with the state of Georgia and did not request assistance from the Deaf community and the Deaf community requests the same interpreters for every meeting. Ms. Cadena stated she asked during the contract period if only agencies who had a proven track record with providing services in Georgia could be considered for the contract but

was told that it wasn't feasible because the didn't want to limit the scope of the marketplace for competition. Moving forward, another vendor who contracts with requested interpreters from Deaf members will be utilized to provide said interpreters.

Mr. Yates discussed the Commission's work since inception and specifically discussed the focus on language and literacy acquisition for each child in Georgia who is deaf or hard of hearing. The Commission members are stewards of residents, not citizens of Georgia and discussed the integrated model and the progress that has been made toward that expectation.

Liz Nelson Routh from the Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation was introduced and stated she is here to observe. Beth Lytle spoke regarding the Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation Hearing Aid Program. She gave an overview of her work with facilitating a word group of experts and professionals in the deaf and hard of hearing community, which includes an audiologist from PENTA and an audiologist from CHOA and a member from the Georgia Public Service Commission. The PSC provides funding for the pediatric and adult hearing aid program. The work group also has other Commission members and the executive director, David Paule for the Lighthouse. There was significant turnover at the Lighthouse in 2017. The lighthouse relied on members of the work group to provide the proposal to the PSC. The work group brought up concerns including: the children's hearing aid program isn't effective because the Lighthouse is underfunded and under staffed and the technology isn't advanced. The website isn't HIPPA compliant. Staff must manually enter data into the system. The rejection rates for the program are higher than expected. GLLF considers retirement savings and cash equivalents as part of the screening. Families are ineligible if they have more than \$5,000 if they have those cash equivalents even if they meet the federal poverty guidelines. GLLF doesn't want to eliminate that barrier without prior approval of the PSC. In November, that barrier was removed but still remained on the application for services. The Lighthouse also denies services to those who are underinsured or who have high deductibles. Amendments have been submitted to the PSC. There was discussion about how many children were served in 2017 and 2018 and discrepancies with those data points about what had been reported. GLLF received \$13,500 to market the program; the program has been geared from birth to three years old. Liz stated the new application would be completed before Christmas. GLLF isn't taking into consideration medical expenses. Stacey Tucci will be the liaison for the GLLF and the Commission. Dr. Tucci stated that the final amendment to the PSC and GLLF contract is due by January 5 so there is time to work with the Lighthouse on these issues. Families pay a sliding fee scale so no family receives a hearing aid for free. The contract allows for up to 120 children per year to receive these services. There are direct contracts to manufacturers for wholesale prices. There are twelve months left on the contract until it's open for new bids for a three year period. Only GLLF has a program to provide hearing aids. The governor's office approved a \$1.3 million dollars to fund a mobile audiology unit. Mr. Yates stated that it's important for children to have hearing aids so that they can develop a reading brain. Every second a child is without language there is neurological damage to reading brain construction. Three percent of children receiving special education services who are deaf or hard of hearing in Georgia read proficiently in the fourth grade. Dr. Goldsmith sad there is a crisis with pediatric cochlear implants because Medicaid grossly underfunds them. There are no implant surgeons in south Georgia. Audiologists won't use loaner banks because they don't get reimbursed enough of the money and want to make a profit from the sale. They use the loaner bank because the need it to meet the criteria of a three month trial. Dave and Liz

from the GLLF will be invited to speak at the next Commission meeting to respond to the concerns presented by the Commission about the pediatric hearing aid program. Georgia reimburses at a higher rate than any other state in the Southeast region through Medicaid.

Stacey Tucci provided a chart in which it shows the six major transactions that build toward universal literacy acquisition for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Brandt Culpepper stated that in each of the 18 health care districts in Georgia, there is an Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) coordinator who helps families transition from the newborn hearing screening did not pass to any follow-up services that the baby needs. The EHDI program is working through their processes to better share information so that they can track babies better as the transfer out of the EHDI program into early intervention and through the educational system. The expected outcome is that by the third grade assessment that children are literate in written English. There is funding through a Title V block grant. She is a member of the task force of state law 462, of HB 844 the birth to literacy plan legislation. One priority is developing learning communities in different areas of the state; one now exists in Augusta. There is a tele-audiology clinic in Waycross. Medicaid in Georgia now reimburses for tele-audiology services. Loss to documentation, where a child receives follow-up services but it's not reported back to the EHDI program, is an issue. Lost to follow-up is when a family can't be reached for services. For 1-3-6 goals, they are meeting the 1 month goal but about 60% for the three month goal and 50% for the six month goal. Georgia is doing a good job compared to other states, but still not reaching all the babies. Comer states the 1-3-6 model is primitive and Georgia should replace it with an accelerated program. Comer told Brandt that it is the Commission's responsibility to support her role and that he has total trust in her and her service. Stacey said her role at the Department of Education (DOE) is implementing Act 462. In order to create a stakeholder advisory committee it was decided those stakeholders would be the ones who are most affected by the system. The committee has 13 members who each have a defined eligibility criteria. There is an application up on the website now for people to apply to serve. The deadline for application for the committee is January 30. The goal is to spend time during the meeting to make a final decision about who will sit on the stakeholder advisory committee. The commission is to ensure more representation of the deaf and hard of hearing community in Georgia, birth to adult. The interagency task force are those state level employees who make decisions around policy, funding and can make suggestions around legislation and policy. Those members are people from DPH, OECAL, DOE, Pathway and Georgia Technology Authority (GTA). A decision can be made about creating a Commission work group around the PSC contract in March depending on the work with GLLF. The Commission will vote on members of the Stakeholder group at the March meeting.

Deshonda spoke on Georgia Hands and Voices. There are 45 chapters thorough the US and Canada and started over 20 years ago by a group of parents to provide support to families regardless of communication modality. She became the Executive Director three years ago. There are two program in Georgia. One is the Guide By Your Side program and housed under the division of state schools. There is an advocacy support and training program that is housed under DPH. She works with prenatal and neonatal and it's a part of talk with me baby. Also, assisting parents to work in the role of being their child's educational partner and modeling that for families. Then they move through talking about early intervention and the urgency around communication choice. There are issues in focus and IDEA and a 504 plan to participate equally

in the IEP meeting. Historically they provide peer to peer support.

There will be a special meeting to focus on the broad overview what we're looking to do outside the agenda of a meeting.

Comer stated the goal for children is self determination because healthy brain development it's about fixing or remediating, but empowering children .

Dr. Lederberg asked to talk about the r role of the commission for deaf and hard of hearing adults and the role the Commission should pursue.

Comer thanked Debbie for allowing use of the Auditory Verbal Center for

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned.