

Georgia Commission on Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons
Wednesday, February 10, 2016
3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Atlanta Speech School
3160 Northside Parkway, NW
Atlanta, GA 30327

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Dr. Jiovanne Hughart, Mr. Jim Lynch, Dr. Beth Lytle, Ms. Mary Reed, Ms. Cathy Torie and Mr. Comer Yates

Members Absent: Mr. Chuck Leavell

Staff Present: Ms. Katherine Cadena

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Yates at 3:10.

Mr. Yates thanked everyone for attending. He explained the purpose of the meeting was to have an informal discussion and collective wisdom so that members feel fully engaged prior to the next meeting and not work in isolation. He solicited questions from the other members. Members expressed questions about their role and opportunities for influence. Commission members read through the legislation of the Commission. Mr. Yates discussed the need for an amendment to include not just the Department of Human Services, but to include the Department of Community Health and the Department of Public Health. Mr. Lynch stated his concerns over the lack of appropriated funds. Mr. Yates discussed the current funding for hearing aids for children and for the public service commission. The Commission can recommend the legislature appropriate more money to specific services. Monies currently being spent might be better spent elsewhere. For example, in December 1945, the Ford plants were making cars. The following Sunday, they were making airplanes. Same resources, same people. Work was redirected and recalibrated because of Pearl Harbor. There are activities going on with parents and children and money is being spent, but it is not being spent consistently with science. Every child who is deaf should be reading on grade level. The literacy rate for children who are deaf is between five and nine percent. There are no state statistics so it is estimated. For children who are not deaf, it is 35 percent. The suicide rate for adults with profound hearing loss is typically estimated to be much higher than the rest of the population. There is talent already in state government who are committed to children and adults. The Department of Public Health is a resource and it is our responsibility to help them be successful in their work. The Commission can support the work of Kelly Jenkins with Let Georgia Hear.

Mr. Yates gave some background into the culture challenges regarding listening and spoken language and ASL. Modality is not the focus. Language proficiency, or the acquisition of language is the goal. The goal is grade level reading. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), not a CRT score, is a national standard for reading proficiency. In Georgia, 53% of children who are not on free and reduced lunch read proficiently and 23% who are on

free and reduced lunch read proficiently. Both 22% of Hispanic children and 22% of African American children read proficiently. Early language development is crucial. A healthy brain only happens with early language development. Two hundred children in Georgia are diagnosed with hearing loss annually. Every parent must know the importance of language prior to being diagnosed. Talk with me Baby is a program out of the Georgia Department of Public Health. Pathway is currently exploring how language nutrition can be both spoken and signed. Both speech language pathologists at the Atlanta Speech School and parents at home use baby signs to typically developing children to push language.

Dr. Hermanns discussed the 100 Babies Project. Currently, the program is actively monitoring about 200 babies. They would like to provide additional supports, such as advocacy training and interventions regardless of if the kids are falling behind. Sometimes the primary diagnosis isn't hearing loss. This is a longitudinal study. Next year they will ask for an increase in budget for additional staff and training. The identification rates are higher than they've ever been.

Dr. Lytle discussed Let Georgia Hear, which is a movement to mandate private insurance companies pay for hearing aids for children. The Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation is receiving funds from the Public Service Commission to provide hearing aids for those that qualify based on income and residency. Eighty-two applications were received and 52 hearing aids were distributed, which was below the set goal of 100 hearing aids. The State Health Benefit Plan paid out \$114,769 of \$800,000 available. Audiologists who partner with Georgia Lions Lighthouse are reimbursed minimally for their services. Hearing aid producers give devices at a discounted rate.

The next meeting is planned for March 15 from 1:30 until 4:30 at the Auditory Verbal Center. Dr. Lytle will invite Ms. Jenkins to speak at the next meeting. Commission members will submit questions to ask Dr. Hermanns prior to the meeting. Stacy Tucci, from Georgia Pathway will be invited to the meeting. Regina Green from Georgia Lions Lighthouse will be invited to the meeting. Lisa Marie Shekell from the Department of Community Health will be invited to attend the next meeting.