

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Thursday, January 28, 2021
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Virtual - Zoom

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Ms. Jennifer Clark, Dr. Jiovanne Hughart, Ms. Kelly Jenkins, Dr. Beth Lytle, Dr. Amy Lederberg, Mr. Jimmy Peterson, Ms. Ellen Rolader, Dr. Stacey Tucci, Ms. Deshonda Washington, and Mr. Comer Yates

Members Absent: Dr. Chip Goldsmith, Ms. Dana Tarter

Guests: Michael Nix

Interpreters: Dean Evans, Amanda Shannon

I. Call to Order and Welcome

This was the last meeting for Comer Yates to serve as chairperson for the commission. According to the bylaws, vote by the commission members with a quorum will determine the new chairperson. Seven members were needed. At least nine members were present. Nominations were sent to Dr. Stacey Tucci privately through the chat feature. Nominations were revealed at the end of the meeting to be decided by vote by commissioners.

II. Text to 911 – Michael Nix, Executive Director, Georgia Emergency Communications Authority

- Mr. Nix is also the state 911 director.
- He helps provide guidance and policy recommendations for the 911 centers across the state.
- Right now, he is in the middle of drafting and introducing legislation to bring next generation 911 to Georgia.
- What this means is that 911 service will be brought up to the 21st century when it comes to technology. Currently, 911 calls are being routed on incredibly old copper lines for phones and this limits the texting and multimedia capabilities to 911 centers.
- Legislation is being introduced this year that will give the funding mechanism to build out this emergency service IP network across the state.
- There are approximately sixty 911 centers that are either accepting texts in 911 or in the process of accepting 911 texts and that covers about 40% of the 911 centers but about 75% to 80% of the population. But there is still a decent number of the population that is not covered by a center that operates text to 911.
- Legislation will also include annual training for communication officers on how to handle calls for citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing or have speech disabilities.
- Currently, the language in the bill is specific to TDD and TTY but will also broaden the language so that it is not technology dependent and to train on how to communicate effectively.
- Also engaging the Domestic Abuse Awareness community for the benefit of texting

- Looking to bring multimedia capabilities to the 911 centers as well. In some instance, other states have been able to live stream ASL interpreters with the 911 call. Georgia will look into this as well as the program grows across the state for further accessibility to the community for public safety.
- Annual surveys are conducted with the 911 centers on various things including technology they have or any upgrades they have which will provide an accurate picture of what is provided at each center that have the text and 911 capabilities. Once this “map” of centers is finished, it will be shared with the commission.
- It was suggested that those who receive the 911 texts need to be aware that texts from the deaf community will not necessarily be in English but in ASL. So they would need training on how to read or handle these kinds of texts.
- Video phones will also need to be considered when it comes to training.
- The bill that is being drafted right now hopefully will provide funding to be able to release an RFP to solicit proposals and hopefully the legislation will go through this year.
- How will this be funded? Right now everyone is paying an existing 911 fee on all phone lines (landlines, wireless, VOIP) which is currently \$1.50.
- Any opposition to this? If there is any opposition, it would most likely come from the phone carriers especially if there is any increase or adjustment in the fee.
- Mr. Nix has been working with Senator John Albert as a primary sponsor from the Senate. He is on the Senate Public Safety Committee.
- What are the carrier fee for 911 in other states? It is different for each state. Some collect on some of the lines on cell but not on landlines. The only state that has a fee higher than GA is Alabama.
- 3 years ago, Georgia did not have a state 911 program. Thus, there was no state leadership or oversight on 911. So now, the state is trying to adjust the fee to be able to allow the state to have a better funding model to bring 911 projects to the state.
- Commissioner Kelly Jenkins was able to connect Mr. Nix with the head of 911 in Nebraska to see what possibilities there were for an interim solution before establishing the next generation capability to GA. As of now, what is working in Nebraska won’t work for GA due to technical reasons but Mr. Nix has some ideas about what can be done in the interim before implementing the roll out for Next Gen.
- Possibly tapping into the Public Service Commission (PSC) for funding?
- One thing the commission could do is to write letters or make calls and letting the General Assembly know that the DHH supports the work of Michael Nix.
- Important considerations: Training for 911 staff, those that struggle with written information not just for the DHH community but with other populations that might struggle with writing proficiency.
- The commission may need to weigh in with Mr. Nix so that he’s educated on the big issues for those in the DHH community.
- What also may need to be taken into consideration is for those who struggle with written proficiency and how to accommodate for that population and not just the DHH community. May want to tap into those who have expertise in adult literacy.

III. GCDHH Logo

- Dr. Stacey Tucci introduced the topic of possibly professionalizing the commission and one way of doing that is creating a logo for the commission and to be able to put that on a letterhead.
- Something else that was briefly discussed was the changing of the Georgia Pathway to Language Facebook page to a commission Facebook page so that there is sort of a community repository.
- Regarding the logo, GA DHS is able to create a logo and a letterhead for the commission.

- Mr. Eugene Rhee, Limited English Proficiency and Sensory Impairment program manager, will be working with the commission and the designers at DHS to create a logo for the commission. It was asked to the commissioners if there were any images, colors or any kind of wording that the commissioners would like to see within the logo or what the logo will communicate. It was also asked if there was anything that the commissioners do not want to see in the logo as well. This will help the designer to create the logo.
- The following were ideas voiced by the commissioners:
 - no image with an ear with a line through that.
 - words – access, partnership
 - A few words that we can incorporate into the logo in terms of what we do.
 - something that conveys not just about access for the dhh but to convey the power of the DHH.
 - and not just a benefit for the DHH community but for all.
 - Something iconic for our state that could be reflected in the logo.
 - Rhode Island and Nebraska DHH logos are good examples
 - The use of the word Equity
 - Having an image or icon that is specific to GA. Not necessarily a peach.
 - Connections
 - All age groups
 - Access, Communication,
 - Community
 - image that illustrates support of all modalities
 - reaching full potential
 - access, communication, equity, community
- Information received from this meeting will be communicated to the logo designer at DHS and once the logo is created, it will be presented to the Commission.

IV. November Virtual DHH Community Town Hall / Path for the GCDHH work in 2021

- Thinking about 2021, it is to see where the gaps relative to COVID-19 were for the DHH community and what remaining gaps are out there that need urgent attention.
- What are some short term priorities from the concentric circles across the lifespan?
- Commissioner Ellen Rolader gave a recap on the DHH community town hall meetings from this past November.
- Not many people attended the meeting however these people grew up in Georgia as citizens that are part of the deaf and hard of hearing community. They were professionals in vocational rehab, mental health professionals, elderly. Not only did they state their complaints and issues but also offered solutions and suggestions.
- The bottom line seemed to be a lack of accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing community.
- Everything needs to be not only written in English but it also needs to be ASL accessible.
- There were six different topics, each topic on a different virtual town hall meeting.
 1. Transportation
 - it would be a good idea if people could have a profile with Uber, Lyft so that that it would be known that the passenger is deaf or hard of hearing.
 - it would be good if Uber or Lyft could accommodate deafblind customers and how they would be able to access this service.
 - Would it be possible to ask for particular drivers who know the customers particularly when it comes to deaf/hard of hearing customers, i.e. an Uber driver who knows ASL?

- Need to find out more regarding the Mobility van. Do you need Medicaid or Medicare in order to access this service? Is there information out there like a brochure to refer to?
- DMV/Department of Driver Services (DDS) – Information about what to bring in before the deaf and hard of hearing get their driver's licenses.
- There is no clear communication on interpreters and knowing what to do.
- Having V-Logs on their websites to help communicate with the deaf and hard of hearing community.
- Getting pulled over by police: Would like to come up with a way to notify police that the driver is deaf or hard of hearing. The deaf driver doesn't necessarily want to be moving hands during a pull over. Identifying information on Driver's licenses? License plates?
- Airport travel: How would a deaf person know the plane has been transferred to another gate since announcements are usually communicated verbally.

2. Medical Access

- Deaf and hard of hearing persons have the right to a free interpreter for their doctor's meetings on any type of appointment mandated by ADA, however may don't know their rights for that.
- Need more education and awareness for DHH community but also for doctor's offices and public facilities.
- If one is able to get a Spanish interpreter with no problem, then one should be able to get an ASL interpreter with no problem.
- If interpreters are provided, it needs to be certified or licensed interpreters. Medical interpreters need to be certified to communicate medical jargon.
- Georgia does not require that interpreters be certified therefore we cannot hold them accountable for any miscommunication especially when it comes to doctor's offices.

3. Communication Access during COVID-19

- Public messaging/communication to the deaf and hard of hearing community is an issue.
- They don't know what to do, where they are supposed to go, where to get testing, i.e. COVID-19, what are the protocols?
- Information is sometimes available from All Hands On Facebook page but information really needs to be coming from GEMA.
- One good thing is that the Governor has had an interpreter at all his press conferences.
- Need to get more information out to the DHH community
- Masks for DHH are also a problem. Clear masks fog up, regular masks cover the face which keeps others from seeing the facial expressions which is one key to communication.
- Regarding children in schools, deaf parents with children don't get the information from the school other than through their children. However, they don't know if the information is correct or accurate. Sometimes they automated calls from the schools which they are not able to hear.
- For DHH students learning virtually, it is difficult for them to stare at a screen for long period of time as they need to watch what is being communicated as opposed to listening students who can look away from the screen and still be able to hear. This makes it challenging for both students and parents. Learning virtually makes it difficult to learn and thus may fall behind in their work.
- Telehealth was another area of discussion. If using or wanting to use telehealth, platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams are used but then internet is needed and unless there is strong bandwidth, there will be challenges.
- Commissioner Rolader is trying to get in touch with the National Association for the Deaf to find out if they are experiencing any issues for the deaf community.
- It was stated if the commission could be a watchdog and make sure that access is available for all

public announcements.

4. Food and Housing

-Food stamps application may be difficult to understand since it is written in English. Same with SSI application. It is a multipage application and they may not understand what they are supposed to do. There needs to be visual communication. Just like it can be translated into Spanish, it should be translated into ASL.

-One could call 711 relay but other help may be limited for DHH community and some are not educated on how 711 Relay works.

-Vocational Rehab in Georgia had assistance for deaf persons but the agency has been falling apart.

-Adam Garfinkel, who was a participant in the meeting who is also a teacher at the Atlanta School for the Deaf knows of a lot of resources and information about students and is willing to share this information with the commission in a future meeting.

5. Access to Internet

-A senior citizen participated in this session and she shared about how many seniors, who are hard of hearing, do not know sign language.

-Seniors need information and education when it comes to communication with others via internet or phone, i.e. captioning for telephone calls or captioning over internet services.

-One issue is the cost of internet services and many cannot afford it. Higher bandwidth, which may be needed, means higher costs and this is not good for the deaf and hard of hearing community.

-Internet should not be a luxury but an absolute necessity for the DHH community.

-Just like Relay is at no cost, internet should be at no cost for the DHH community.

-There is captioning for seniors called Otter through Zoom. One half of the screen is for captioning, the other half is video so you can see the person while reading the captioning.

-Another resource is Captionmate, free real time captioning.

6. Emergency services through 911

-Most if not all that was discussed with Michael Nix at the beginning of the meeting was covered for the text to 911 topic.

-Bottom line is getting accessibility to both the deaf and hard of hearing community and finding ways to fund this accessibility to make it happen.

-There are other states that do V-logs, as such, maybe Georgia can find out more information from these states on what they do.

-Need to figure out how to fund V-logs so that these V-logs are on each of the state websites where a user can go and engage with that information through American Sign Language. State government is supposed to be providing access.

-Need to see if V-Logs can be funded and available on some of the state websites within a year i.e. Medicaid and Medicare accessibility (Department of Community Health).

-The issue of funding however is figuring out who is responsible for funding V-logs development. Need to track down who is responsible and to hold them to account.

-Different approaches to finding out:

-All Hands On / GEMA

-Governor's Policy Advisor

-Communication Director at Dept of Education, Megan Frick

-Department of Public Health

-Miranda Williams at the Governor's office

-Kelly Sterling at Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
-Georgia Advocacy Office

-Dr. Tucci reiterated the transportation issue of having a profile on ride sharing apps for companies like Uber or Lyft to indicate passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. This would not only help people in GA but anywhere. It would be a matter of getting some type of connection to either of these 2 companies to make this request.

-Commissioner Peterson commented about having something on the GA driver's license to indicate a deaf or hard of hearing driver. It would be reasonable to let police officers know that the person they are dealing with is a deaf or hard of hearing driver.

-Commissioner Rolader also commented about the driver's license test. Very often a deaf person shows up to request an interpreter for a future appointment because a request for an interpreter cannot be done over the phone. This is may be difficult for deaf persons because that means they have to show up in person to the Department of Driver Services office twice to take a driver's test.

-Commissioner Clark stated that she would be able to look further into what could be done for police officers to identify deaf person driver whether it be via license plate marking or looking up license plate to identify driver is deaf or something on the driver's license.

-Recommendation is to go to the Governor's office with a specific request to the Department of Driver Services.

V. Nomination and vote for new chairperson for the Commission

- The only commissioner to receive a nomination for chairperson was Kelly Jenkins.
- Vote was taken for Kelly Jenkins to be elected as the next chairperson for the Commission to replace Commissioner Comer Yates.
- Vote was unanimous (9 votes)
- Commissioner Jenkins accepted the nomination and position of new chairperson.
- Other commissioners and members of the meeting expressed gratitude to Commissioner Yates for the role that he played and the work that he did for the Commission.

VII. Meeting adjourned: 2:35pm