

**Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing  
Strategic Planning Meeting  
Wednesday, March 1, 2023  
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.  
Atlanta Speech School Board Room  
3190 Northside Parkway, NW  
Atlanta, GA**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present:** Mr. Ibrahim Dabo, Ms. Kelly Jenkins, Dr. Amy Lederberg, Ms. Anne McQuade, Dr. Alison Morrison, Ms. Ellen Rolader, Dr. Stacey Tucci, Mr. Jimmy Peterson, Ms. Jennifer Clark, Ms. Deshonda Washington

**Members Absent:** Dr. Paula Harmon,

**Interpreters:** Ms. Anne Zimmerman, Mr. Chip Penland, Ms. Laura Clark, Ms. Lori Civello

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### **Call to Order and Welcome**

Commissioner Kelly Jenkins called meeting to order at 12:00 pm and welcomed all participants to the meeting.

### **Background and Goals**

Kelly opened the meeting by introducing the Commission's focus on narrowing down initiatives to 5 larger initiatives and 3 letters of support. Mark Rosica led the discussion and allocated 5 minutes to discuss each of the 3 letters of support, and 20 minutes for each commissioner to discuss their initiative.

Kelly discussed that Dr. Amy Lederberg suggested the Commission appoint a vice-chair for the Commission, and the nomination process would be similar to that of the Chairperson. Kelly advised that the Commission will be voting for Dr. Lederberg electronically rather than waiting until April.

Mark Rosica provided a recap of the initiatives and how the Commission had narrowed down to 5 larger initiatives. They would now discuss a process for deciding the order of these initiatives. The discussion would include follow-up questions for clarification purposes only. Subgroups would be formed to address follow-up work. Stacy Tucci provided a reminder of the Smart Goals and how they would be used to move the work forward.

### **Letter to Georgia Medicaid and Medicaid CMO Related to Access to Audiologic Services (Dr. Alison Morrison)**

Dr. Morrison advised she would be focused on the barriers that exist in Medicaid codes related to audiological services. She mentioned that there were specific barriers for children in the State of Georgia that were causing delays to service in access audiological services. Dr. Morrison referenced the different Medicaid codes discussed at the prior Commission meeting and the proposed changes, some of which had no costs associated with them, while others did. She also proposed some possible changes to Medicaid, as audiological services are covered for children with Medicaid in the State of Georgia, but not for adults with Medicaid. Dr. Morrison requested a letter of support from the Commission to take the next steps in finding a solution.

Dr. Lederberg asked if the letter of support should be more specific to adults and children, and if Dr. Morrison was primarily focused on children. Dr. Morrison replied that she was willing to accept either, as she did a lot of work on the children's side of things, but the issue for adults was also quite significant. Ellen Rolader suggested two separate letters, one for children and one for adults, while Stacey Tucci offered to provide data sets that showed that children who were Medicaid recipients were vulnerable to delays in language and literacy or exhibited lower achievement levels in language and literacy. Dr. Lederberg added that there was other data available that showed that having a good hearing aid fitting was critical to outcomes. Jimmy Peterson suggested that at the end of the letter, they could invite Medicaid representatives to join a Commission meeting to advise them on how to push this forward. Mark Rosica pointed out that the project owner did not mean working on their own, and that they could ask for help from the Commission or outside people.

### **Letter to Georgia Legislature Supporting the Establishment of a Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Anne McQuade)**

Anne McQuade provided an update on the proposed bill SB 8, which aimed to establish a commission for the blind. However, the bill was not getting much support in the legislative review process and was unlikely to pass. However, it has sense been replaced with SB 274, which had the same provisions as SB 8, except for mentioning SSP (Support Service Provider) services. Anne proposed that the Commission support SB 274 and requested assistance in writing a letter of support noting that the letter would need to be drafted by March 6<sup>th</sup>.

Stacey Tucci had a question about whether any groups were opposing the bill, but Anne said that everyone seemed to be in favor of the bill but added that there was no guarantee that it would pass, and they would have to hope it makes it through crossover day (March 6<sup>th</sup>). Dr. Lederberg mentioned that the commission for the blind would require funding and suggested that they should consider where the money would come from. Mark Rosica agreed and said the Commission should consider this when putting together the letter of support.

### **Increases in Text-To-911 Availability throughout Georgia (Anne McQuade)**

Anne McQuade provided an update on the ongoing survey to find out how many public safety answering points provide a text-to-911 capability. The response so far has been decent, but a complete survey is still awaited. Anne proposed the idea of providing a letter endorsing the need for text-to-911. If this approach does not yield better results, the Commission suggested publishing a list of the counties that provide this service, and those that don't.

Stacey asked for clarification on the demographics that currently have access to text-to-911 and whether the letter should be county-specific. Anne clarified that several cities have their own public safety answering points, which is why there are more points than counties. The aim is to increase coverage by 50% overall. Anne stated that the cost of upgrading public safety answering points to provide text-to-911 capability is a barrier, but that with the latest Federal infrastructure bill, the funds may be available. Jimmy Peterson suggested involving the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence to support the initiative.

### **Initiative Voting**

A vote was taken on each of the 3 initiatives. All 8 voting members present voted to proceed on the initiative letter to Georgia Medicaid and Medicaid CMO related to access to audiologic services.

The Commission then voted on the initiative letter to the Georgia legislature supporting the establishment of a commission for the blind and visually impaired. The Commission voted 6 to proceed, with 2 members voting that they would like more information, specifically regarding the differences between SB 8 and SB 274. It was agreed that the language of SB 274 would be shared with the Commission and an example letter of support would be emailed to the Commission members. A deadline of five days was set to complete the SB 274 letter. It was also suggested that a simple initial letter of support could be written first, followed by a more detailed letter after understanding the specifics inside the bill.

The Commission voted on the initiative letter to increase in text-to-911 availability throughout Georgia. All 8 voting members present voted to proceed on the initiative. Funding for this initiative was discussed and it was mentioned that it might be possible to have some of the funds from the funds from the recently passed infrastructure bill used.

Regarding priority of the 3 smaller initiatives, it was the consensus of the Commission that the 1<sup>st</sup> priority would be a letter in support of the blind and visually impaired commission, 2<sup>nd</sup> would be a letter in support of Georgia Medicaid and Medicaid CMO audiologic services, and 3<sup>rd</sup> would be a letter in support of text-to-911 availability across Georgia.

### **American Sign Language (ASL) and Closed Captions in English and Spanish for Georgia State Agencies (Ellen Rolader)**

This initiative focused on creating a vlog in American Sign Language (ASL) for state agencies to make public messaging accessible to the deaf community. It was discussed by the Commission to create a vlog for the Georgia Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing website. This would include creating a script and identifying presenters to be used. This process would take between six to eight months. One of the larger goals mentioned was having ASL language options for all state agencies available for the deaf community. Stacy Tucci suggested potentially having two different categories for ASL videos: durable public messaging, and situation specific messaging. Jimmy Peterson mentioned that funding could be a barrier for creating ASL videos for state agencies. Jimmy suggested a potential letter being sent to the Governor's Office to formally make a request that state agencies create these ASL videos. Kelly Jenkins suggested and

reiterated that it would be a good idea for the Commission to have these ASL videos available on the public Commission website before a request was made to have it implemented by other state agencies. Stacey Tucci added that if the Commission were to include ASL videos on the public website, it would provide insight on how much this would cost other state agencies. Ellen Rolader made mention that since North Carolina has already implemented something similar, they may have a guiding document on how to proceed with implementation.

### **Georgia Interpreter License (Jimmy Peterson)**

This initiative focuses on licensure for interpreters operating in Georgia. Jimmy Peterson discussed that his committee has met with stakeholders including the Georgia Association of the Deaf, the Georgia Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the National Association of Black Interpreters. Licensure has been an ongoing discussion, and bills from other states have been reviewed. These stakeholders would like to propose a bill that would call for interpreters operating in Georgia to obtain licensure in order to provide interpreter services. Several states around Georgia already have licenses in place for interpreters, and those are run either by a professional standards committee or as a commission. The committee had concerns about a potential conflict of interest, which prompted the committee to seek guidance from the GACDHH Commission on developing a bill to be brought before the legislature.

The difference between a licensed interpreter and a qualified interpreter was discussed. It was explained that a license indicates certification by a registry and that the interpreter has passed specific tests. A qualified interpreter may have graduated from college but does not necessarily have the necessary skills for all scenarios. It was noted that there are no specific tracks or certifications for licensure, and interpreters would have to indicate their ability to accept jobs in certain settings. The establishment of a licensure entity was discussed by the Commission, but it was determined that it would be beyond the scope of the Commission to oversee such a registry/entity. Instead, the Commission can propose that the State of Georgia establish such an entity to oversee a licensure registry, however, more clarity may be needed as to the details of such an entity. It was also mentioned by Jimmy that the registry operating costs could be funded by license fees paid for by interpreters.

### **SSP (Support Service Provider) Services for DeafBlind Adults (Anne McQuade)**

Anne McQuade is proposing the Commission assist in creating legislation to provide support services for the DeafBlind community in Georgia. Currently, there is a limited program that provides these services for those receiving vocational rehabilitation, but it does not cover the majority of the DeafBlind population. A white paper sponsored by the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) highlighted the reasons why SSP services are the right solution for the DeafBlind population. Anne noted that 35 other states currently have SSP programs in place. Anne explained that she, Commissioner Peterson and several colleagues have launched a survey to DeafBlind Georgians. Thus far, responses indicate that 70% of DeafBlind Georgians feel they don't receive the support they need. It was acknowledged that funding for this legislation would be a challenge.

Anne stated that she is hoping the Commission's past experience in getting legislation passed will assist in getting SSP legislation passed in Georgia. Stacey Tucci provided background information on the prior legislation the Commission assisted with getting passed. She stated that the reason the previous legislation came together was because a nonprofit organization decided to put their financial, physical and human capacity behind that initiative. Stacey emphasized that the Commission did not do this work on their own. It was also mentioned that Kelly Jenkins helped write the previous legislation. Kelly emphasized that helping write the bill was very time consuming and that it required pooling bills from all 50 States, highlighting pieces from these bills. It was also mentioned that this previous bill failed to pass 4 years before it was finally passed by the Georgia Legislator.

Anne McQuade emphasized that she was still committed to making this legislation happen at some point in the future.

### **Implement Hearing Loops in Key Public Places (Ibrahim Dabo)**

Ibrahim Dabo proposed the Commission help drive the need for hearing loop implementation in public spaces, with perhaps one key location as a start. Ibrahim shared his experience of the first time he used assistive listening systems via his telecoil. He advised about what a positive experience this was and how it allowed him to clearly understand conversations and information in a way that he previously did not know was possible. It brings into question how many within the hard of hearing community with hearing aids and cochlear implants are unaware of this technology, and how could the Commission help drive further implementation of this technology in settings where information transmission is important, such as hospitals, airports and courthouses. Ibrahim mentioned Juliëtte Sterkens as a potential resource that could present about the benefits of assistive listening systems. Ibrahim also discussed the possibility of working with the United Methodist Church to spread awareness of the technology and advocating for its use in different settings.

Mark Rosica advised that per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), assistive listening systems are already required in public assembly spaces with audio amplification. The Commission discussed the implementation of these systems in various public places, including the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport and the Capitol Building for the Georgia General Assembly, but Ibrahim noted that assistive listening systems may already be in certain areas of the airport, but not others. It was suggested that Delta may be able to help with implementation at the airport given the company's push towards diversity and inclusion. Going through Delta to push for assistive listening technology at the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport was regarded by the Commission to be good place to start the push for more implementation across Georgia.

### **Panel Community Engagement Series (Jennifer Clark)**

Jennifer Clark is proposing creating a community engagement panel that highlights to success stories and journeys of deaf or hard of hearing adults to increase visibility of the community at large. Jennifer detailed the need of parents and children to listen to success stories and journeys from the community and the impact hearing these stories can make to those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The community engagement panel would be a one-to-three-part series that would be led by the Commission. It would be specifically targeted at students in kindergarten through high school and their parents. It was suggested by the Commission that Georgia PINES could be a potential stakeholder and could possibly aid in distribution of the series. It was discussed the possibility of this panel being live-streamed in order to provide great access for parents and students across the State. Jennifer noted that the timeline for completion of this project would be 12 to 24 months.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Mark Rosica led the group discussion regarding next steps. All 3 letters of support including Medicaid Access to Audiologic Services, Commission for the Blind/Visually Impaired and Text-To-911 Availability were approved to move forward with the Commission letterhead. Specifically, the letter of support for the Commission for the Blind/Visually Impaired may require two letters, one letter prior to March 6<sup>th</sup>, and an additional letter if the legislation moves forward after March 6<sup>th</sup>. Kelly Jenkins concluded the meeting, noting that all the proposed projects discussed in the meeting had clear deliverables. Kelly expressed her gratitude to the Commission members for their time and their passion in the work that they do for the Commission.

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:37 PM.**