

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Thursday, August 11, 2022
1:00 pm
Virtual – Zoom

Meeting Minutes

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

Members Absent: Dr. Paula Harmon, Ms. Deshonda Washington

Interpreters: Ms. Anne Zimmerman, Mr. Chip Penland

Captioner: Ms. N. Brooks

Call to Order and Welcome

Commissioner Jenkins called the meeting to order and welcomed all participants to the meeting.

Swearing-In Ceremony for Newly Appointed Commissioners

Commissioner Jenkins congratulated all newly appointed commissioners. She reported that photos taken during the ceremony will be posted and will also be included in the next legislative report. She recognized the Governor for giving the Commission the opportunity to participate in the swearing-in ceremony.

Commissioner Dabo provided remarks regarding his experience at the swearing-in ceremony. The event was described as a special moment as he reflected upon the journey of turning the challenges he experienced with hearing loss into being able to support others with hearing loss and being recognized for such in an official ceremony.

Dr. Paula Harmon Named One of Top Doctors in Atlanta

Commissioner Jenkins recognized Commissioner Harmon for being named one of the top doctors in Atlanta magazine and being chosen for the cover of the magazine. Commissioner Jenkins encouraged others to reach out and congratulate Commissioner Harmon on her accomplishment.

Eugene [Rhee] No Longer Department of Human Services (DHS) Limited English Proficiency and Sensory Impairment (LEPSI) Program Manager

Commissioner Jenkins announced that Eugene has taken a new position, and he will be missed by the Commission. In the interim, Pamela [Carr Cosby], will be assisting the Commission. Commissioner Jenkins noted that Pamela is working to fill the position soon.

Approval of April 14, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Lederberg made a motion to approve the minutes from the last Commission meeting. The meeting minutes were approved with no changes noted. Commissioner Jenkins indicated that the Commission would like the minutes posted within three weeks so the general public can view the minutes if they are unable to join the meeting. She agreed to work with Pamela [Carr Cosby] to get the minutes to Commissioners within three weeks of the meeting if reasonable so that they may be digitally approved.

Report by Commissioner Dabo on the Hearing Loss Association of America Convention

Commissioner Dabo attended the annual Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) convention in Florida. Commissioner Dabo described the technological advancements made around cochlear implants. He reported that cochlear implants really change things for people who are profoundly deaf. He learned that persons could use both the cochlear implants and hearing aid at the same time when they have single-sided deafness and asymmetrical hearing loss. He reported that fear and lack of knowledge are preventing people from getting cochlear implants.

Commissioner Dabo mentioned that as part of the research symposium, Dr. Candace discussed hearing healthcare disparities. As related to cochlear implants, Dr. Candace stated that persons who do not have insurance would have to pay \$100,000 plus out of pocket for a cochlear implant. Geographic location, race, age, and socioeconomic status impact hearing healthcare for adult cochlear implant recipients. She also mentioned some of the challenges rural patients experience in that they are more likely to have job losses related to their hearing loss, be unwilling to travel due to lack of funds in that this healthcare requires up to 10 appointments from consult to one year follow-up. Commissioner Dabo reported that black patients are underrepresented in cochlear implant referrals and implantation. For example, 68% of white patients and 18% of black patients obtain evaluations. Dr. Candace mentioned that improving and extending Medicaid coverage and using telemedicine for evaluation, counseling and programming may expand access to cochlear implant services.

Commissioner Dabo also described technological advancements made in hearing aids. For example, hearing aids have motion sensors that can detect when someone falls and automatically sends a text message to up to three contacts on that person's list.

Commissioner Dabo encouraged participants to view all the great information concerning research and technological advancements in cochlear implants, hearing aids, and hearing loops to be posted on the HLAA website.

Commissioner Dabo reported that he led the discussion at the Convention on diversity and inclusion. The discussion included looking at engaging places of worship or the use of short videos to encourage and show the significance of getting help and to raise awareness around hearing loss. The discussion also centered around the importance of self-advocacy.

Commissioner Dabo mentioned that the 2023 HLAA convention will be held in New Orleans in June and that more information will be posted on the HLAA website.

Commissioner Jenkins advised that she and Commissioner Tucci have been working with DPH and DOE on a DOE request for CARES funding from COVID for the purpose of expanding pediatric teleaudiology across the state. She indicated that some of the private funds could be used for assistance such as transportation to appointments and having a parent navigator who may accompany folks on their appointments. She further advised that work is underway on a bill on the federal level called 'Allie's Act' that would require coverage for cochlear implants.

Report by Commissioner Peterson on the National Association of the Deaf Conference

Commissioner Peterson attended the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) conference in Orlando, Florida. He reported a reduction in conference attendance due to many delegates or registrants protesting Florida's Don't Say Gay bill by not attending the conference.

During the conference, Commissioner Peterson learned that some states have a Chamber of Commerce that focuses on Deaf and Hard of Hearing services by partnering with local and state agencies and governments. He mentioned that perhaps the Commission could partner with the government at the state level and make recommendations or comments as a united front.

Commissioners Peterson and Jenkins congratulated the Georgia Association of the Deaf for an award received at the conference.

Commissioner Peterson reported that NAD will be working on five top items for the next two years. One item involves mentoring, training, life coaching for deaf individuals and students as a result of the impact of COVID. He reported that some students did not go to school or were not able to get out and became more isolated. During COVID, they may have been unaware of what was going on and what was happening. Thus, the mental health of deaf individuals and students was impacted.

Commissioner Peterson remarked that it is time for more diversity within Deaf education. He indicated further that BIPOC students need to see diversity not only in the classroom but also at the administrative levels.

Commissioner Peterson stated that 90% of Deaf children whose parents do not know how to communicate with them, do not have access. He mentioned that oftentimes doctors are unaware of these issues and backgrounds. Thus, they expect that children who are Deaf to be able to access the hearing world. Instead, doctors need to be educated in providing resources to parents. Thus, there is a need to improve these resources and NAD must work with the Education Committee in order to provide these resources.

Commissioner Peterson advised that NAD has established a task force with Deaf Seniors of America to analyze the problem of Deaf seniors in nursing homes or assisted living facilities who may become isolated or more depressed due to lack of access and resources such as how to acquire an interpreter or obtain captioning.

Commissioner Peterson reported that NAD released a webinar that addressed the concerns of Asian and Indigenous persons who felt American Sign Language users had oppressed them in their use of their language and their native signs. Research found that they have a legitimate sign

that should be respected by our learning their sign language. Commissioners Peterson and Dabo agreed to work together to discuss how issues of racism and DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion] could apply in Georgia.

Commissioner Anne McQuade remarked that protactile is the number one most requested topic for instruction among the deaf-blind community and that she does not have a trained pair of Deaf-Blind instructors. Commissioner Jenkins inquired as to what the Commission could do to highlight this issue. Commissioner McQuade agreed to reach out to the Helen Keller Institute to see if they conduct workshops using persons skilled in protactile.

Commissioner Peterson reported that the next NAD conference will be held in Chicago in 2024.

GaCDHH Committee Report: Legislative/Administrative

Commissioner Jenkins advised that they are drafting the legislative report and will be asking Commissioners to approve the report and add any feedback. She advised that pictures from the swearing-in ceremony and budget requests were added to the report.

Commissioner Jenkins advised that they are continuing to work with the Senate to get the remaining two at-large Commissioner positions filled.

Commissioner Jenkins also discussed the OAE bill. The bill allows non-audiologists to perform hearing screenings on infants and children up to age 21. It used to be only up to 3 months of age. This change allows greater accessibility to children for diagnosis of hearing loss. She indicated that a plan was being developed to ensure that schools, audiology practices, ENTs, and others are aware of the new law.

Commissioner Jenkins mentioned that the Commission has been allocated \$20,000 in the budget. Thus, the Commission will be considering how to access and use the funds. The funds won't be available until 2023. She advised that the Commission will be requesting a direct allocation from the Governor instead of through an agency. She remarked that although commissions in Georgia tend not to have very large budgets, Commissions for the Deaf/Deaf Blind in sister states have budgets as high as \$4 million and as low as \$600,000 and provide ASL classes, translation services accessibility, fairs, and that some have paid staff of up to 15 persons. Commissioner Jenkins praised the Commission for the work they have been able to accomplish through volunteer efforts.

Commissioner Jenkins indicated that she would be working with committees to select one or two items over the next 12 months to work on exclusively in order to prioritize those items.

Commissioner Jenkins indicated that Commissioner Tucci requested that the Commission revisit the discussion regarding 501(c)(3) status for the Commission. She indicated that this issue would be something to float to the national body of the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to determine experiences specifically related to DHH issues.

Commissioner Jenkins indicated that Commissioners are currently working on some Medicaid codes that are not currently working and some interpreter issues and there will be an update soon.

Commissioner Tucci reported that there has been incredible growth in the education sector even with all the challenges that students, families and school systems experienced during COVID years. She mentioned phenomenal growth around third grade level reading and ways to identify a

broader swath of the DHH student population. Commissioner Tucci indicated that two American Sign Language assessments that can be given to meet the deliverables of the legislation around biannual language assessments have officially been identified. The visual communication sign language (VCSL) assessment is an assessment for children ages 0 to 5. Commissioner Tucci also reported that there are now four Deaf assessors who have been trained and can serve the entire state of Georgia. She encouraged persons with a child or a family or a school district serving children who are using ASL to reach out to Jessica Bergeron, the new outreach director at the state schools. The ASL RST (receptive skills test) and the ASL EST (expressive skills test) are tests for children four to 13 years of age who are learning and using ASL. She advised that there are eight Deaf assessors who can serve the entire state. She confirmed that these assessments are free, and the assessors will go out to anyone in the state that needs the assessments. Thus, they have fully addressed the biannual language assessments for children using ASL because these assessments cover birth to 13 years of age.

Commissioner Tucci stated that the updated information is being distributed to school districts. The information will be available in DHH and Georgia DOE newsletters and at DOE's special education director meetings, DHH website, and various other venues. She encouraged all to share this information.

Committee Report: Basic Needs and Safety Services

Commissioner Peterson reported that they have not been doing police training and safety officer training until recently. He indicated that the PowerPoint developed, and the curriculum used to train six regions in the state of Georgia was put on hold. They were advised that the presentation did not satisfy certain requirements, that some items should be removed, and more information added, especially cultural information. He also reported that the information was lost and will have to be developed again and sent to the Georgia Department of Public Safety.

Commissioner Peterson stated that they are captioning videos now and will have them available soon. The videos address such situations as what happens if police pull over DHH persons, whether a weapon was in the vehicle or if the person had been drinking. Commissioner Peterson states these videos can be used to train officers across the state in their interactions with Deaf individuals throughout the community.

Commissioner Ellen Rolader explained that the committee is working with different agencies setting up vlogs and informational videos in ASL. Commissioner Rolader stated that five agencies want to start developing vlogs to provide information about their services. She mentioned that perhaps agencies would pay for the service themselves and put out bids, finding people willing to be videoed in ASL and share the information on the internet.

Commissioner Rolader reported that text to 911 was also discussed in their committee meeting. Commissioner McQuade agreed to follow-up with Michael Nicks to determine support needed so that more counties have the option of text 911.

Commissioner Jenkins confirmed that the CDC does not have an ASL video about monkeypox and that this issue was elevated at NASADHH. She remarked that some states issued their own videos but also filed a complaint with the CDC stating that they need to provide the information for all people. Commissioner Jenkins reminded the group that when issues are nationally

broadcast and are applicable to the entire country such as healthcare issues, the Commission needs to work through national agencies to make sure they are addressing those issues as well.

Committee Report: Education

Commissioner Lederberg reported that she did research on whether they could loop or have some type of assistive device in medical offices. She indicated that it would be good to find a doctor willing to try different solutions. It was recommended that the Commission could start with an ENT office and that possibly Commissioner Harmon may be interested in trialing this. Commissioner Dabo mentioned that HLAA is working to have a lot of places obtain hearing loops, like airports. He advised that the HLAA specialist for hearing loops is willing to give presentations.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee

Commissioner Tucci mentioned that O.C.G.A. §30-1-5 included the creation of a stakeholder advisory committee, a 13-member panel within GaCDHH. She advised that the Commission needs to get the stakeholder advisory committee back together and start moving on the action items that were put on pause in 2019 due to the pandemic. This committee is focused on the pediatric population, the child population, the student population and is specifically focused on education, early intervention, family support, and other such topics.

Commissioner Tucci stated that she will contact the 13 people identified to serve on the stakeholder advisory committee. Since committee members were only able to serve one year of their three-year term, she will ask them if they would like to complete their term. For those choosing not to do so, the Commission will have public postings, so that people will be able to apply for those positions. Applications will be shared with the Commissioners who will vet the applications and vote to appoint people to any open positions. Commissioner Tucci advised that within the next two GaCDHH quarterly meetings, she would like to have confirmation of stakeholder advisory committee members.

Next Meeting: October 13, 2022

Commissioner Jenkins proposed that for future meetings, the Commission considers using the last hour for breakout sessions for committee meetings since interpreters are present and the meetings tend to end early.

Commissioner Jenkins advised attendees to contact Pamela Carr Cosby (pamela.carrcosby@dhs.ga.gov) to receive Zoom information regarding the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by Commissioner Jenkins.