

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Thursday, October 8, 2020
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Virtual - Zoom

Meeting Minutes

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

Members Absent: Mr. Jim Lynch

Guests: Kelly Sterling, Lou Erste, Aaron Shoemaker

Interpreters: Chip Penland, Tristan Galloway

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Wanting to have the Commission be sensitive to the needs of the residents of Georgia who are deaf or hard of hearing relative to the particular crisis of the pandemic and access to the services necessary.

Dr. Stacey Tucci has done a lot of good work on thinking about full participation across the life span and what that looks like.

A copy of the “GCDHH Commitment Across the Lifespan” was displayed.

There was a lot of focus on child needs, but the commission is to serve the DHH community across the lifespan.

The Commission may need to tease out some more action items in light of the lifespan as the Commission moves forward in its work.

II. Developing Partnerships – Kelly Sterling

Kelly Sterling who is the Director of the Office of Deaf Services at the Dept. of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

He was asked to join the meeting and share what he has done in terms of his work with the DHH community.

Since 2015, he has been working at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, worked there for a couple years and then transitioned community service boards and the focus of that effort was to implement, to improve behavior health services to individuals who are deaf and who communicate in sign language across the state.

He did that for about a year and then went into his current position at the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and transitioned back to the department, and is currently the Director for the Office of Deaf Services

Mr. Sterling is looking forward in ways the Commission and DBHDD can partner better going forward.

He first started sharing about how DBHDD is the named plaintiff of a lawsuit in the state of Georgia back in 2009. From that lawsuit there was a consent order settled, and it required that DBHDD establish ASL fluent behavioral health services across the state. They now have clinicians and case managers placed all over the state who can communicate and sign fluently.

In the consent order there's a requirement for ASL fluent group homes and those group homes for DD individuals are required to have staff who sign at the level that those consumers need.

His staff, go around the state, and do communication assessments, and is utilizing the one standardized tool for communication in sign language which is the communication skills assessment that was established by Alabama, South Carolina.

They serve people with Medicaid, who are state funded and they may have a low level of insurance. DBHDD fills in that gap. Depending on the provider network, they may or may not be able to serve individuals who have private insurance. Which leads his office to be contacted by individuals around the state by those who want access to clinicians and case managers who sign and to provide support to them and to do dialogue with a clinician or a case manager who really gets what it means to have hearing loss. This is one of the challenges that they have to contend with.

There are other challenges as they navigate their community service boards : financial issues they are unable to bill for services or they just don't have the bandwidth to provide those services.

They have worked very hard to provide culturally competent training to their provider network to make sure that they understand the issues that it not only occurs in therapy, but even with the front office staff they're getting consultation on in how best to interact with people with hearing loss to understand the nuances in the variants that people present when they have hearing loss.

DBHDD offers a wide array of services. They offer housing support to individuals in terms of the intellectual and developmental disabilities.

They have a bit more oversight over that provider network because they are contracted in those supports. And there's more authority in terms of the department being able to determine how accessible those group homes are.

This presents a great deal of frustration in respect to personal care home and personal homes. Personal care homes are licensed by the Department of Community Health.

DBHDD has no basic authority to determine their regulations but are working with them to encourage adaptation. There is language in some other policy manuals that reflect the provision of accommodations to get to a space where people feel they're able to communicate effectively within their home environment in those types of settings.

Mr. Sterling also shared he gets contacted often by those in the Deaf community to complain about issues such as not being provided an interpreter when visiting a doctor or not being provided services because they didn't bring their own interpreter to the dentist or housing needs.

He is hoping that with the Commission's help to put forth a comprehensive effort to address issues that surround the DHH community and to put it in front of legislators who might need to see it.

Ultimately, it is to the benefit of the community of individuals with hearing loss around the state of Georgia.

Also, because we have to have either identified behavioral health diagnosis or an intellectual and developmental disability diagnosis, if they're outside of that, they are unable to assist.

Thus, there's a large chasm of support that's needed across the state of Georgia, and he is hopeful that the agencies and the Commission can help to fill that void.

More specifically, is it more about people that are either in crisis, or they are heading towards that. It's oftentimes the people who are capable, receive the information needed and then having to contact insurance companies to see if it is covered. Many have difficulty navigating through the insurance layer. And, unfortunately, the insurance companies are not providing meaningful direction to individuals who need communication accommodation and where they can provide it.

They simply generate a list and say, "These are the providers. Good luck."

What is also needed is communication accommodation. Different entities can tend to argue towards what is considered reasonable and what federal requirements allow which forces individuals to advocate for themselves and then try to overcome that hurdle and according to some individuals, this is insurmountable.

Dr. Tucci raised the point on how the Commission might be able to support pushing out that type of training to providers (i.e. cultural competency) that don't work directly with DBHDD. For example, the GA Mobile Audiology program and how they are working with the Department of Public Health to develop professional learning for pediatric audiologists to be more responsive and culturally appropriate when engaging with Deaf clients.

How might the commission be able to expand the scope of who's getting that type of cultural competency training or that type of communication access training. How can the commission support that broader expansion of training?

Some things to consider:

- creating how-to documents on how to advocate for yourself, when going to dentist or doctor, when requesting communication access;
- a flowchart or graphic to indicate what terminology to use to get the interpreter you need.

The town hall meetings can be a place where input and feedback can be received about how to address pain points.

The partnership with DBDHH and the Commission will hopefully be able to address and take action on these types of issues.

Commissioner Peterson stated that his organization has a good partnership with DBHDD as well as the state advocacy office who specialize in ADA laws and have been able to create posters and flyers and how to get an access to an interpreter so that is one resource that can be used. They meet every 2 months and addresses emergency services as it relates to the DHH community. There may be some other state agencies that the Commission can ally with and then go from there.

It was clarified the distinction between the DBDHH advocacy office and the Georgia Advocacy office and how the Commission can work with both.

Mr. Sterling also brought up the idea of a census and the need to have more concrete data on where individuals are residing as an effective means for outreach.

He brought up a documentary about the Deaf and hearing loss community in Japan and their efforts to reach out to each other after the disaster at Fukushima. They were able to effectively find where everyone was and to help provide resources to the communities that needed it the most all because they had a registry.

This can be possible if all the state agencies work together to coordinate this data. With requisite permissions in place it would allow this type of data to be more effective in reaching rural communities, under aged Georgians who are navigating public school systems and parents who don't necessarily know of resources.

Commissioner Rolader added that it is also helpful for the emergency personnel as well so that it would give them some way of knowing who the persons who are deaf and hard of hearing are. Right now there is no way of knowing where they live or who they are.

Some communities are doing it better than others. For example the Savannah area where because of the impact of hurricanes, the 911 system does identify persons with hearing loss.

911 services is an issues that needs to be brought up again for the DHH community and have uniformity across the state and bring it up in the next legislative session.

Mr. Sterling stated that basically the emergency operations coordinator for DBHDD, when there's communities impacted, is a rotation of several staff who works with the one who is the permanent emergencies and disaster planner for behavioral health which is Miss Jeanette David.

It's when a person calls that they know if it involves a certain address they know if the individual at that address has a hearing loss. It is not certain if it stems from county data or if it is from some type of form that they submit out, he will check and find out and confirm.

If collecting data it will not only have to be an electronic data base but will also need hard copies as well as back up, in his opinion.

Commissioner Peterson brought up asking NASA DHH and see what they are doing and see what Georgia can do as a result.

III. Creating a Foundation for GCDHH – Mr. Lou Erste

Dr. Tucci gave an introduction for Mr. Lou Erste, who is the State Schools Chief Policy Officer at the Georgia Department of Education. He has been working in the policy division for quite some time and is also well versed in school systems across the United States. He has done quite a bit when it comes to administration and leadership and policy within school systems and for students who are school age elementary, middle, and high school and he has recently joined the division of state schools at the Georgia Department of Education.

He will be speaking on potentially looking at developing some type of 501 c3 for the commission so that the commission would be able to intake funds and be able to actually contract in the Commission's name.

As a result of the 501 c3, the commission might actually be able to put some finances behind some action items instead of relying solely on volunteer efforts.

He will share what a forward path would be if the commission did decide to establish some type of nonprofit related to the Commission's work so that that it can fund some action items.

According to Mr. Erste, the establishing of a 501c3, as possible, would have to get an amendment of the law.

This was done in 2019 for the Georgia Department of Ed Foundation. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement did it in 2017 and the state charter schools commission did it in 2015.

Because the current law, related to the commission, just says that the commission can contract in its own name, and it doesn't go beyond that, it can it can apply for grants, and so on.

But, it, it doesn't have some key things that it needs. And so, in the handout (please see "Creating a Foundation for the Georgia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - 2020-10-07) there was a reference to the steps with Georgia's law which had to be amended twice, but the bottom line of HB 130 in 2019 gives the foundation the power and the authority to incorporate a nonprofit that could qualify as a 501 c3 of Internal Revenue Code, and to a definition carrying out any of its powers and accomplish its purposes. That's the key thing.

The Georgia foundation for public Education in 2013 got an amendment to allow the state board to move money to the foundation but it couldn't do it as a 501 c3 until 2019.

So included in the handout was a copy of House Bill 130 from 2019 and we don't need to spend time talking through the specific things but this standard language is very similar to what was in the bill for, NGOs, and the state charter schools commission.

It's the language that will allow the commission to both have the authority and the power to incorporate a 501 c3, and to have funds come in and disperse funds and so on. This would be the model to establish a foundation for the Commission.

Dr. Tucci provided feedback and stated that creating a foundation would be similar to that when funding was provided for Pathways. It would allow establishing an annual budget, engaging in contract work, establishing some full time director position or pay people to come to a training. This may be the only to get some funding behind action items for the Commission. The Commission will need to some research regarding this and believes that the General Assembly could approve this.

According to Mr. Erste, a 501 c3 will need to be established. However, it will be up to the Commission on how it will be structured. There will be board members. It could be the commission members or it could be a subset of the commission or have somebody from the outside. But by establishing a 501 c3, it will allow the foundation to receive donations/funds; allow people to donate.

Commissioner Yates asked for a motion for the Commission to pursue establishing a foundation.

Commissioner Amy Lederberg moved.

Commissioner Kelly Jenkins seconded

Discussion: How long does it take to establish a 501c3 and what does the commission need to do?

Mr. Erste explained that it begins with the first two steps: to get a bill lined up so that it is easy to pass and then get the governor to sign. Would need to have attorneys to draw up all the paperwork which could generally cost about \$10,000.00 and lawyers fees to get a 501c3 to be approved, which could take anywhere from 2 months to 2 years.

Commissioner Peterson recommended that we can emulate another agency that has a 501c3 that can help the commission initially and take the baby steps need to establish. 14:17:04 Jimmy.

Commissioner Yates called for a vote from all the Commissioners in favor of the commission moving forward with presenting drafting and presenting legislation for the upcoming session of the General Assembly to establish a foundation for the commission.

Vote was unanimous (Dana Tarter voted in favor via email).

IV. Developing Partnerships - All Hands On

The Commission is looking to start partnering with organizations who are working directly with the DHH community at large and All Hands on is one of those organizations.

Aaron Shoemaker is the director of All Hands On. He learned ASL as his first language as his parents who are able to hear were involved in the deaf community and both of them were interpreters and he's now an interpreter himself.

All hands on is a 501 c3 organization that was established in, 2014. On the board of directors are individuals who are deaf individuals who are interpreters, individuals who are educators of the deaf and deaf interpreters. The organization is considered to be a deaf run and a and a deaf-centric organization. They work within the deaf community adjacent to emergency management where emergency management is very much a government operation, which includes, fire, police, EMS, hospitals, and any other service provider that are under government operation and control.

A firefighter in Los Angeles, California developed a citizen emergency response training. And from there, FEMA got ahold of it, and blew it out to the entire nation, so it is now the model. The basic training for any citizen in the country to have access to responding to emergencies, because the fire department, the police department aren't often already there, when a disaster happens.

However, what we discovered in 2011 was that very rarely were deaf individuals involved in this training, and never had this training delivered directly in American Sign Language. It had always been presented in spoken English.

So, it was discovered that Cobb County Emergency Management Agency has one of the best longest standing certification programs in the entire state of Georgia, and their volunteer services coordinator, Bernard King and he didn't want to just figure out a way to include the Deaf but he actually suggested a closed class.

And once a closed Deaf class was offered, the amount of participation went through the roof. The first class we did had three deaf participants in 2015, the rest of the class was hearing people.

The next question was how do we get Deaf instructors?

And the way Bernard Kind did it was to go to GEMA and to request a specific class for Deaf instructors to be certified by GEMA instructors, if they could meet all of the same requirements as their hearing contemporaries. So Cobb County flew him to the FEMA Training Center in Maryland, where he took their train the trainer courses, and then came back to Georgia and was qualified as a GEMA certified instructor. 5 deaf instructors were certified in the first class. All Hands On now has 9 certified instructors who are deaf. There are a total of 11 deaf certified instructors in the US. One in Ohio and the other in Oregon.

Being a 501 c3, they are able to partner with other state agencies in a way that for-profit businesses and agencies are not able to do. So when hurricanes and other disasters like COVID hits. Somebody at GEMA contacts him and says, "What's the most effective way to do the interpreting and to get the information that we're responsible for out into the deaf community. And what was determined was that he best and most efficient way to do it is to have an interpreter team embedded right there in the state Operation Center.

They partner with the GA Association of the Deaf and with other deaf nonprofits.

V. Virtual DHH Community Town Hall

Commissioner Rolader gave an update on the upcoming DHH community town hall meetings in November.

There will be six different topics, each topic on a different virtual town hall meeting.

The topics of each Town Hall meeting will be:

1. Transportation – for instance, taking the subway and what kind of challenges it might raise concerning the deaf specifically for transportation.
2. Food – especially during COVID, which may make it a challenge for those in the deaf community specifically like needs for a pantry or similar issues
3. Medical Access - access to having masks; how you would communicate when people are wearing masks covering their faces while during the pandemic, especially if you don't have an interpreter. If you have a doctor that uses a mask how are you able to communicate with the doctor or dentist and other various obstacles faced as a deaf person
4. Access to Internet - rural areas that don't have access to the internet. How can the state provide Internet services for emergency purposes or educational purposes. What challenges do they face with internet access and the mediums to access the internet, i.e. iPhone, laptops, tablets, etc.
5. Emergency services through 911 - how emergency services are accessed using 911; what information is needed, and how we as a commission can gather that information
6. Communication Access during COVID-19

The purpose of these town hall meetings is that the Commission is trying to meet at least the basic needs of the DHH community and to provide access or full engagement. It will be a starting point for building out the life cycle as illustrated in the GCDHH commitment across the lifespan.

Update from Dr. Brandt Culpepper:

There is a lot more activity in terms of having availability of services for parents now that some of the private practice offices are opening back up. So there is better access for the follow up services, Georgia mobile audiology, and within this week, they are now able to go out and start doing their diagnostic evaluations for infants and families.

Received funding for a third purchase of equipment for a tele audiology location for some of the underserved areas.

VI. Commission Housekeeping

*At the next meeting, Commissioner Peterson and Dr. Tucci can give a report on their review of the base camp for the national organization that the commission joined and can look at what other states are doing.

*Bios and pics: please send to Eugene so that this information can be posted on the website as soon as possible for the sake of transparency.

*Meeting minutes for the July meeting was sent to all the commissioners for approval. Please send a yes or nay for the minutes. The August meeting minutes will be sent soon.

*All the facilitator positions have been filled for the town hall meetings in November. If anyone else would like to volunteer, there is nothing wrong with teaming up and working together. Also, if there is a preference for a particular date, please send to Dr. Tucci the date you would like to facilitate.

*Jim Lynch, because he is heavily focused in Green County on community, has resigned from the commission. There will need to be a replacement on the commission for an adult who is deaf or hard of hearing. Please think about nominations for this position.

*Commissioner Yates also mentioned that it may be a time for a change for the chair of the Commission; someone who can take the commission to the next level to lead the commission or try to support the commission. So for the next meeting to think about a process for an election of that person and who would be best suited for the role and how to make that transition.

VII. Meeting adjourned: 3:06pm