**Georgia Commission on Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons**

**Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

**1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

**Auditory Verbal Center**

**1901 Century Blvd. #20**

 **Atlanta, GA 30345**

**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.

Mr. Yates welcomed members and guests to the meeting. Meeting minutes from March were approved after a motion was made and passed.

Michelle Davidson, acting executive director and Lindsey York, director of outreach and special events with the Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation (GLLF) presented information on the hearing aid program. The Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) provides funding to the GLLF to administer the hearing aid program which allows for the purchase and distribution of hearing aids to approximately 1,000 low income Georgians every year. GLLF has developed partnerships with 150 hearing providers and manufacturers. The adult program reaches in 150 Georgia counties. They provided a PowerPoint to the members that outlines achievements of the program. Eligibility is determined by residency and income. The program requirements for children to 19 years old are that one parent or guardian must be a Georgia resident for at least one year, uninsured or insurance denial for hearing aids, birth certificates for a valid ID and up to 400% of the federal poverty guidelines. The program currently excludes noncitizens who are adults. There is a copay for the program based on income levels. There was a pediatric expansion on November 13. There was a drop in the number of adult patients served. The provider fee is $175, low for market value, so there’s a request to increase the provider fee to $250. GLLF currently receives $700,000 from the PSC, but there will be a request to increase it to $1,000,000. On average, the total payment for a child is $1,200 for a unilateral and $2.400 for a bilateral. Mr. Yates asked how the Commission could support the GLLF. GLLF asked for a letter of support to the PSC and to increase the provider fee to $250. The PSC provides 70 percent of funding to the program while co-pays provide 30 percent. Sometimes the co-pays can exceed $2.800. However, the manufacturers have negotiated to stretch the money further. Medicaid doesn’t cover BAHAs on a soft band for a child up to age five. Medicaid will pay when the child can have the BAHA implanted (after age five). GLLF has put together an in-house marketing plan but have spoken with an outside marketing firm to help with social media and other forms of outreach.

Ms. Kelly Dundon, Georgia Department of Public Health, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program Coordinator spoke about the program. She stated a recurring trend in EHDI is audiologists are performing tests and misdiagnosing people, then those people are going to reputable place and receiving a different diagnosis. Some were being told their child was deaf or hard of hearing but later were found to have normal hearing. It was emotionally stressful for the parents. Ms. Dundon would like a workshop at the next AAD convention to address ABRs. It should be framed around the primacy of language. A diagnosis of deafness, while traumatic, on one hand, has a significant impact on neurological development for a baby as parents are dissuaded from using language. There is science around the first eighteen months of a baby’s life and language. The 1-3-6 model is outdated. Mr. Yates said there is a proposal to partner with Grady hospital and the birthing center to do two screenings before children are discharged and going to Hughes Spalding. The newborns will be referred to the Atlanta Speech School, where they will receive an audiological exam within 10-14 days. The early interventionist will be there at the exam so the child would receive that intervention within the first two weeks of life. This is going into an evaluation at Georgia PINES and is a partnership with the Department of Public Health, Grady and the Atlanta Speech School.

Jimmy Peterson, Executive Director of Georgia Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Nancy Kelly Jones, a bilingual consultant at Atlanta Area School for the Deaf, discussed the working group for creating legislation regarding access to language so that all children are on a trajectory to read proficiently by the end of third grade. Mr. Peterson explained Lead K is a group of about twenty different organizations who are preparing to support a bill that would hold agencies and programs accountable to language access, verbally or through sign language. There is an ASL specialist, an English specialist, an audiologist, and others. Georgia Pathway will continue to monitor the facilitation of the program. Mr. Yates said Pathway isn’t in a position to lobby for the bill. The Commission is responsible for making recommendations about legislation to the general assembly and the Governor’s office. Mr. Yates thanked Mr. Peterson and Ms. Jones for their service.

Mr. Jim Lynch spoke on looping. Mr. Nick Hobbs with Active Life Hearing Loops was in attendance and also discussed looping initiatives. Mr. Lynch was able to experience the International Hearing Society’s convention at the Hilton hotel in Atlanta. He was impressed. Mr. Hobbs said he installed loops in the Gwinnett County Senior Services Center and North River Church of Christ in Marietta. Contacta, the manufacturer, funded the equipment and Mr. Hobbs provided the labor. Loops won’t be obsolete in the future because it’s still the best solution for meeting settings. There is no plans to remove a telecoil from hearing aids.

Dr. Hughart discussed Adopt a Band. She will contact the Georgia Independent School Association for representation at their conference.

Dr. Lytle will contact people at the Department of Community Health to discuss Medicaid issues.

Additional action items were discussed and the meeting was adjourned after a motion was made and passed. The next meeting is scheduled for December 12 at the Atlanta Speech School.