

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY MEETING: March 24, 2023
Hybrid Meeting

Welcome and Introductions:

Members Present: Michelle Paonessa (Chair), Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Janette Fulton, Melissa Hutzler, Lori Leiman, Lee Sheffield, Amy Letteri, Deb Shostak, Kallie Mendenhall, Alexander Van Hook

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director)

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley – Sassaman

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

Change to Agenda

Interview canceled and executive session after meeting scheduled.

Russ made a motion to pass the change and Lea seconded.

Review and Approval of Minutes:

The December 9, 2022 meeting minutes were reviewed. Russ made a motion to pass with no corrections. Lea seconded. Minutes were approved.

Guest Speaker: Dawn Sokol, Director, Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services

Dawn spoke about how the Department of Labor and Industry was organized. She went over the basic process which involves the referral and the decision on which bureau would work with the person based on the greatest impediment to employment. The process includes an assessment to look at needs, what barriers there are to employment, and what services are needed to remove those barriers. The bureau then makes goals and plans and starts working to remove the barriers to employment. This is primarily for people over aged 14, although there are specialized programs for children before age 14. Dawn also spoke about how everything is individualized so what can be provided depends on what the customer needs. She gave her contact information for anyone that has questions and answered a few questions from the council.

Guest Speaker: Ben Laudermilch, CEO, PATF

Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF) is a statewide, non-profit organization that helps Pennsylvanians acquire the assistive technology devices and services they want. PATF programs and services include information and assistance about assistive technology, funding resources, and vendors. It also includes financial loans for AT and financial education. PATF assists Pennsylvanians of all ages, income levels, disabilities, and health conditions. Ben spoke about mini-loan

programs, low interest loans, smart home instillation consideration, etc. Ben also discussed the PATF AT funding guide. Contact information for PATF was given. Ben answered some questions from the council.

Department Reports:

Aging –

- The PACE Program continues to collaborate with Accessible Pharmacy Services (APS), the national leader in medication management for the blind, low-vision, and DeafBlind communities. PACE and APS are finalizing plans for a pilot initiative focusing on PACE enrollment with multiple morbidities including DMII that have visual challenges and or blindness. PACE will assist in the identification of patients at risk and APS will provide a detailed description of the study parameters and interventions. APS proposes to deliver a system of comprehensive medication management to Pennsylvania seniors at risk.
- The APS system of comprehensive medication management consists of a multi-focal series of interventions that have been developed and established with the most extensive research and connectivity with the blind and low vision community. Their clinical and logistics specialists have served thousands of blind and low vision patients across the country and our leadership consists of the most experienced clinical, technical and accessibility professionals in the country.
- APS patients are provided a menu of options to select the most appropriate packaging and labelling methodology. Their facility is equipped with an extensive selection of automated accessible packaging and accessible labelling engineered specifically to address the needs of the blind, low-vision, and deaf populations. They provide braille, large print, and audio labels, in multiple languages, to assist patient adherence. Patients receive a monthly distribution in the packaging selected with the labelling that best accommodates their individual needs.

State Plan Initiatives:

- Referrals to Hearing/Vision Screenings -- The PACE Clearinghouse continues to develop assistance and placement services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals through the Clearinghouse. In calendar year 2022, the Clearinghouse assisted and referred 344 people to vision services and 121 to hearing services.
- PACE Cares Website Redesign - The PACE Program continues to redesign the PACE cares website and program materials to align with web-based accessibility guidance. The new site is set to be launched in early April.

Education –

- There is a new Acting Secretary of Education Dr. Khalid Mumin. He has served in various capacities as a teacher, dean of students, principal, central administrator, and superintendent.
- Attract, Prepare and Retain: PDE continues to work on its educator workforce strategy to ensure there is a robust pipeline of educators in place to provide a high-quality education to learners of all ages. A few new pieces of this include Career and Technical Entities can apply to create new programs to prepare students for careers in education. This program offering authorized by PDE aligns standards to federal guidelines and opens funding opportunities. Grants such as Teacher Prep2 Practice and Aspiring to Educate STEM grants are being offered and awarded to increase the number and diversity of teachers.
- PDE Conference: The annual Pennsylvania Department of Education Conference, *Making a Difference: Educational Practices That Work*, was held March 1-3. Over 30 nationally renowned speakers presented on a wide variety of topics – from practical strategies that can be used in the classroom, to how to attract, prepare and retain personnel to the field of special education. An exhibit hall featured over 50 vendors, and a poster session included over 30 presentations by LEA personnel. Hundreds of attendees (parents, teachers, administrators) were in attendance.
- The CASE National Conference will be on 11/8-10, 2023 in Pittsburgh, PA.
- BSE Bulletin for Educators: The bulletin provides monthly updates from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education and PaTTAN. Subscribe at <https://www.pattan.net/Publications/BSE-Bulletin>
- PaTTAN has many resources and training opportunities for teachers, parents and students that are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf/blind. <http://www.pattan.net/category/Training/Calendar/>

Health – No Report

Human Services –

Department

- During the COVID-19 emergency, the federal government allowed states to issue additional Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program aka SNAP payments. SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs) are an additional SNAP payment that has been paid during the second half of each month since the pandemic started in 2020. These payments were authorized under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Due to a recent change in federal law, SNAP households will no longer receive SNAP EA

payments in the second half of the month. Starting in March 2023, SNAP households will only receive their regular SNAP payment.

- Medicaid recipients are required to renew their coverage every year in order to keep their coverage. Under federal rules during the pandemic, DHS still sent annual renewals to recipients, but their health coverage did not change even if they became ineligible; this is known as continuous coverage. A recent federal law has ended this. Starting on April 1, Medicaid recipients will need to, once again, begin completing annual renewals on-time to maintain their coverage. All Medicaid recipients will need to go through a renewal process around the time of their normal renewal date in the next 12 months to determine if they are still eligible for Medicaid. In some cases, DHS will use recent available case data to automatically complete the renewal. Those households will receive a letter affirming that their renewal is complete and they are eligible for another year of coverage. When that information is not available, DHS will send renewal information to households which must be completed and returned to DHS within a specified timeframe. [Go to DHS website for more information](#)

Office of Developmental Programs (ODP)

- [Annual data report publication](#); it shares the number of individuals ODP serves, settings where they live, what services are provided to them, and the costs of those services
- Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month
- Federal COVID-19 public health emergency is ending May 11th. On February 14th, the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services provided notice that the Federal COVID-19 public health emergency will end on May 11. There were certain flexibilities ODP had during the public health emergency that will be ending. More information can be found at [MyODP.org](#) under Announcement 23-023.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder Seminar. Through the Lens of Autism: Exploring Priority Areas and Building Support for Everyday Challenges; online training will provide a deeper look into communication, mental health, online safety, and family systems that impact everyday life. April seminar, [link to register](#)

Labor and Industry –

ODHH:

- As of the last department report, there were 745 state-registered interpreters and 36 provisional interpreters. An update to those numbers will be announced during this meeting. ODHH continues to advocate in ongoing legal, education and medical issues that rise due to failure to accommodate requests for interpreters, other accommodations and general questions and

concerns. There are ongoing challenges in the education and workforce setting regarding mask requirements. These challenges of course are due to masks and communications. ODHH has been working diligently to assist with this.

- As ODHH has been working in a virtual environment, we have been adjusting to using more technology for our interactions. This has not been without some challenges. Please know that all ODHH work in part time telework. We continue to be available to anyone in the commonwealth who needs assistance.
- Language Survey - As ODHH Provides advocacy services to those who are deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind, one of our strategic focuses this upcoming year is to create updated education resources that will assist hospital systems in understanding the differences between VRI and in person interpreting. While ODHH recognized we are still in the remnants of a virtual/hybrid world, it is important to recognize the need for in person interpreting at many appointments, tests and other medical situations is vital. We will be working on a survey to go out to the community asking questions on if you have requested in person interpreting and if you were given VRI instead. This survey would be anonymous. The goal is not to put fault at any hospital system, but to gather data that is usable when we create our educational tools. ODHH has been fortunate to work very closely with many of the larger hospital systems in PA. We also would look to collaborate with the PA Department of Health on this initiative.
- PATF/ABLE/PSAD Collaboration - ODHH is thrilled to collaborate with The Pennsylvania Technology Foundation and the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf on fully accessible webinars that will focus on those who are deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind and ABLE Accounts and financial education. This event explored why it is important for the deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind community members to have financial stability; how to save money using an ABLE account; what types of expenses and ABLE account can cover; eligibility requirements and more. The first event was a virtual event that was held on March 15, 2023, and the second will be in person to allow for further accommodations and accessibility for the deafblind community members.
- Social Security Forum - ODDH is partnering with Keystone Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and the Social Security Public Relations Team in Lancaster PA, to host a forum for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind Community in Lancaster. This event came about after multiple local concerns were expressed to our office. These concerns were with Social Security especially in communication and the completion of specific forms that were not fully accessible to the deaf community. After multiple meetings it was determined forums around the commonwealth would be valuable. The objective of this is to help the deaf community connect with their local SSA office and better understand what is offered and how they can request accommodations. Internally, SSA plans to discuss accommodations with field offices and work on ensuring resources are in place that better suit their communication needs. Once the Lancaster Forum is completed, planning will be held to host a forum in Philadelphia.

- ODHH Is thrilled to be hosting the 2023 Hearing Loss Expo. The purpose of the Expo is to educate organizations and individuals who are associated with people who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing but may not have a strong foundation in aspects related to hearing loss, such as communication methods, and technology. The Expo is a wonderful opportunity to showcase products, services, and activities designed for people who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing. We also look to improve on networking, so this venue allows people and organizations to make connections that will improve the lives of people who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing living in Pennsylvania. The date is October 11 and 12, 2023.
- Administration Transition - As we now have a new Governor, ODHH looks to continue the amazing relationship with the new Communications Team to ensure full communication access during high level events. We were honored to coordinate the interpreters and captioning during the inaugural event. With two incredible CDI Teams, not a single part of the message was lost to the commonwealth citizens that needed that interpretation. A recent visit with the Governor to our offices, further showed the future partnership will be continue the excellent communicating access the commonwealth is becoming known for. We look forward to continued work on this.
- As we approach a new year and expansion of services, The Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is pleased to announce that the Support Service Providers (SSP) program continues to be supported. For 2023 and beyond, ODHH in collaboration with the Department of Labor and Industry's Bureau of Administrative Services (BAS) has developed an updated Invitation for Bid (IFB) that will consolidate the program to a single entity for statewide coordination purposes. By issuing an updated IFB that creates a single contract for the state, ODHH will be better able to monitor services and the utilization of funds. We expect the IFB process to move quickly and will communicate out with the deafblind community and other stakeholders once an entity has been selected.

OVR:

- The order of selection has been opened for individuals with the most severely disabilities, those with severe disabilities, and those who do not have severe disabilities. Services are continuing to be provided to eligible customers. The pandemic has significantly affected the number of referrals to OVR, but they are slowly improving. Each OVR office has an outreach plan designed to let potential customers know that OVR is open for business.
- Household income requirements have been temporarily lifted from 300% of the federal poverty guidelines for individuals plus a set amount per dependent to \$100,000 plus a small amount per dependent. Certain limitations on financial assistance for post-secondary training has been lifted.
- Recruitment for residential staff at the DHH Summer Academy have ended and they are being interviewed and selected. OVR continues to recruit for high school students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. Program dates is July 16-26, 2023, and it will once again be held at Penn State's Main Campus in State College, PA. Applicants need to have an open OVR case and currently be in 10th, 11th, or 12th grade during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Applicants who are currently in the 9th grade may be considered on a case-by-case basis. If an applicant does not have an open OVR case, they need to go to their local OVR office to refer themselves for services.

1st Public Comment Period:

Angela B – expressed frustration with system

Kathy L – discussed how people who are both blind and deaf need more services. Also mentioned how Deaf-Blind should be recognized in name of ODHH and advisory council.

Old Business:

a. ACDHH Community Needs Survey Update

The survey is still in progress. With the transition of new administration, there are new policies and procedures, so ODHH is awaiting approval.

b. ACDHH Member Recruitment

Vacancy for public member on council. Please tell people and ask them to apply.

2nd Public Comment Period:

Angela B – Discussed how there should be a specific person to work with families of persons with both a hearing loss and special needs.

Patrick – Mentioned a town hall on April 14

Denise B – The Town Hall will be on April 14th in Philadelphia. Two sessions- 10am and 1pm. Accessible services provided. Anyone can attend. Contact ODHH with questions.

Other:

Russ made a motion to close the meeting and motion was seconded by Janette.

Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is on June 6, 2023.

Pennsylvania's Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) was established as a result of Act 1997-37, which required the establishment of the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Advisory Council. The Council is mandated to provide recommendations to public and private agencies, advocate for services and act as a bureau of information.