



**Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**  
**1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 201**  
**Henrico, VA 23229-5012**

**Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**  
**May 6, 2026**

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| <b>Members Present:</b><br>Carl Cline, Jr., Chairperson<br>Dr. Cathee Wolford, Vice Chairperson<br>Traci Branch<br>Karen Englehardt<br>Chris Gregory<br>Kristin Karmon<br>Aubrey Lipscomb<br>Dr. Andrew Nash<br>John Winstead | <b>Staff Present:</b><br>Eric Raff, Director<br>Karen Brimm, IS Manager<br>Kathleen Frazier, Policy Analyst<br>Brittany Howard, TAP Manager<br>Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager<br>Felecia Smith, Virginia Relay Manager<br>Paul Stuessy, Community Services Manager |
| <b>Members Absent:</b><br>None                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>ASL Interpreters/CART Provider:</b><br>Claire Baldi, CART writer<br>Ally Griffing, Interpreter<br>Katie Jarrell, Interpreter<br>Michelle Moore, Interpreter<br>Lorelei Schanstra, Interpreter                                                                   |
| <b>Visitors:</b><br>Elizabeth Leitch                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

On Wednesday May 6, 2026, at 10:00 a.m., the members of the Advisory Board of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) convened at the VDDHH Conference Room, 1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 201, Henrico, Virginia 23229-5012.

**CALL TO ORDER**

At 10:00 a.m., Chairperson Cline called the meeting to order. Housekeeping matters and communication rules were reviewed. A quorum was present, and the meeting proceeded. Introductions were made of the members and VDDHH staff. The chairperson reminded the board to contact the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office if they are up for reappointment. The roster was reviewed, and members were asked to provide any updates or corrections. There were no changes to the agenda.

The minutes from August 13 and November 5 meetings were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes as presented (Lipscomb/Nash). Motion carried.

**PROGRAM REPORTS**

**Executive – Eric Raff, Director**

Director Raff recognized both International Interpreter Appreciation Day with Dr. Wolford as well as Public Service Appreciation Week.

VDDHH representatives have sat down with the new governor and the HHR committee, provided agency updates, and furnished an agency manual to help facilitate the transition. Dir. Raff is pleased with the new HHR secretary, Martin Figueroa; as he is the former HHR Deputy Secretary from the Northam administration, he is already familiar with VDDHH. VDDHH will report to Deputy Secretary Toni Blue as well as Lucy Schwartz, HHR Policy Advisor. Dir. Raff has met with both already.

Decision Packages: Two of VDDHH's proposals were approved by HHR in December and were included in the outgoing Governor's proposed budget

- Staff interpreter: no additional funding included in the proposed budget
- Combining 2 part-time Regional Specialists into 1 full-time position: existing funding predicted to cover this position
- Position Descriptions are in development
- Hoping to begin advertising in advance of the Fiscal Year to be ready to finish hiring process in accordance with the start of FY27

Legislative Updates:

- During the 2025 General Assembly session, VDDHH was mandated to produce a report on the Virginia Relay Modernization process
  - o The report was approved by HHR and delivered to the General Assembly just before the start of the 2026 General Assembly session
  - o Waiting to hear from the General Assembly about this report
- John Winstead connected with his Delegate to advocate for the funding of the Support Service Provider / Co-Navigator (SSP/CN) through a budget amendment
  - o Another Delegate submitted the amendment
  - o The amendment did not make it into the final House Appropriations Subcommittee report
- The Open Caption bill passed both chambers and was signed by the Governor, will go into effect July 1, 2026
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Language and Disability Access Plan (LDAP) Funds: Department of Social Services (DSS) awards grants to state agencies to accomplish the goals of the LDAPs that agencies developed

- VDDHH Submitted 4 proposals: Document Translation, an audio/visual upgrade for the conference room, funding for the SSP/ CN program, and funding for the staff interpreter position
- VDDHH is waiting for DSS to finalize their decisions

Potential Legislative Proposals for 2027: The last update to VDDHH code was in 2002. VDDHH will first submit legislative proposals this summer for review by HHR and the governor before the agency can move forward with having the proposals brought before the General Assembly

- Proposal 1: codify the Deaf Mentor program as well as SSP/CN program; adding these to the Code of Virginia might aid in securing stable funding
- Proposal 2: Reframe Relay in the Code of Virginia, changing it to Information Communication Technology (ICT).
- Proposal 3: Other general updates for terminology and processes

VDDHH Agency Partnerships:

- Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): regarding concerns raised at the last Board meeting

- DMV is in the process of updating their language to drop the use of the term “hearing impaired” in compliance with the Code of Virginia.
- Discussed the possibility of wider implementation of videophone style devices, as they are already used in DMV call centers
- Discussed accessibility concerns for driving tests for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals
- Department of Elections, DBVI, and the Disability Law Center of Virginia: to hold a public meeting on accessibility for voting.
  - Gather feedback from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community on their experiences at the polls
  - Director Raff would like to increase Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) awareness among poll workers
- Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS): listening sessions to get feedback from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community regarding the topic of aging.
  - Topics of focus: fraud, waste, and abuse in healthcare, as well as accessibility to aging services.
  - Hoping to invite Sherry Collins from Deaf Senior Citizens of America.
- University of Virginia (UVA): part of a working group to develop a telehealth accessibility toolkit

The Deaf Mentor program has gained an employee; CSP has hired a Parent Advisor, her focus will be supporting parents through the Deaf Mentor process.

Break at 11am

#### **VISITOR PRESENTATION – DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES**

Charles Akpoghenobor of DMV provided an overview of UbiDuo devices available at DMV Customer Services Centers as an accessibility measure for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind customers. The devices can be used anywhere and at any time, without requiring access to the internet or online DMV systems. The devices are flexible in use, allowing for changing of text color, font size, and background color. Information from the devices is saved on flash drives, allowing for retrieval of past conversations that can make present discussions easier. The device is used at the DMV and the Department of Corrections. Mr. Akpoghenobor is unsure of whether the devices can be used to communicate with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people who are not proficient in English.

Concerns were raised by the Board about Deaf and Hard of Hearing customers not being made aware that these devices are an option to facilitate communication. Mr. Akpoghenobor stated that he could put up signage in physical locations to indicate availability. Ms. Engelhardt stated that she could not find information about the UbiDuo under the DMV’s “Accessibility” webpage in the hopes that information could be updated there as well. Dr. Wolford and Mr. Stuessy clarified to Mr. Akpoghenobor and the Board that this is not a one-size-fits-all solution for all Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind people.

Mr. Stuessy applauded the DMV on their plan to do broad training and also suggested that they use interpreters for their locations in addition. Mr. Akpoghenobor mentioned that most of the time, interpreters are used. Others suggested VRI. Ms. Branch suggested sensitivity training for staff to treat D/HH/DB customers a little better.

#### **WORKING LUNCH - BOARD REPORTS**

John Winstead – reported on meeting with his state legislator about the SSP/CN budget amendment, participation in RevUp, the American Association of People with Disabilities and Ushers group. Director Raff reiterated that board members can participate in rallies as individuals and citizens, but not as board members. Dr. Wolford – Presentations coming up on 911 and at the Department of Corrections and Christopher Newport University. Ms. Smith has information about 911 to share.

Chris Gregory – He is now a successful cochlear implant recipient. His band has a concert planned in Tennessee, “Waiting to Hear.”

Traci Branch – There is a new commissioner at DARS, Dr. Nedra Moncrief-Craig, and the agency is going through some program assessments and restructuring.

Dr. Nash – reported on his new job with Advanced Bionics.

Audrey Lipsomb – reported on her new job with Richmond Region Tourism (nonprofit organization).

Kristin Karmon – reported on the CMV fundraiser, #1 cause of nongenetic hearing loss.

## **PROGRAM REPORTS (RESUMED)**

### **Policy – Kathleen Frazier, Policy Analyst**

- New materials distributed for manuals: FOIA guide for boards, VDDHH Mission and Vision, updated TAP Guidance Document, a VDDHH timeline, the Analog to Digital Transition report, 2019 DPOR study of the regulation of interpreters, and Developmental milestones and resources for families of Deaf and hard of hearing children
- A copy of the proposed changes to the By-Laws was provided to the board
- Request for Information: shared the internal system for documenting, researching, and responding to questions the board poses during meetings
  - o Chair Cline suggested presenting any answers during the “old business” section of the meeting
- Regulatory reduction: approved by Office of the Attorney General and Department of Budget and Planning, awaiting Health and Human Resources and the Governor’s office to complete their review. There will be a 30-day public comment period after the approval process is complete.
  - o Dr. Wolford noted the risk that comes with proposing legislation, there is a chance it is amended after it is proposed to the General Assembly
  - o Frazier affirmed Dr. Wolford’s comments and clarified the difference between updating the code through legislation and updating regulations
- General Assembly: the calendar was reviewed, the Open Caption legislation and expansion of hearing aid coverage were passed and signed by the governor. The budget has not been finished.
  - o Dir. Raff shared that a constituent that contacted VDDHH about their legislative proposal for requiring closed captions on televisions in public places

Paul Stuessy, Community Services, introduced the department’s new hire, Parent Advisor, with the Deaf Mentor program

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no comments from the public.

## **PROGRAM REPORTS (RESUMED)**

### **Virginia Relay – Felecia Smith, Manager**

- Analog to Digital Transition: Felecia presented the department’s report for the General Assembly
  - o Preparing for how to continue serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community as the transition occurs, considering changing the program name from “Virginia Relay” to “Information Communication Technologies”
  - o Developing legislative proposals to shift the use of funds to focus on providing communication assistance services, including a Communication Facilitator program and establishing Direct Video Calling for state agencies, and modernizing the technology provided through the Technology Assistance Program (TAP)

- Virginia still has a high volume of TTY usage, but due to FCC rules VDDHH cannot get information to identify these users to communicate with them about the transition. Virginia Relay has communicated this to the FCC and begun brainstorming ways to reach users
- Ms. Smith shared the conferences, meetings, and trainings she attended and led in the last quarter

### **Technology Assistance Program -- Brittany Howard, Manager**

- Regions 3, 5 and 7 remain vacant; VDDHH submitted a decision package to combine Regions 5 and 7 into a full-time position with benefits; Ms. Howard is working with DARS Human Resources on the position description and subsequent recruitment
- Contracts: Ms. Howard is working with DARS Procurement to develop modifications based on feedback from contractors. She is working with the Specialists to support consumers through the transition to digital
- TAP is working with DARS Procurement to replenish equipment; a video doorbell that works with Square Glow will be included in the order
- Professional development: Ms. Howard attended the ATIA conference
- TAP survey: about 20 responses received; video doorbells, Smart watches and captioned glasses were mentioned

### **Community Services – Paul Stuessy, Manager**

- Instagram: VDDHH has launched an Instagram page in hopes of connecting with younger populations that may benefit from VDDHH's services and programs
- Better Hearing and Speech Month: Celebrated in May, VDDHH provides information on protecting residual hearing
- Mr. Stuessy shared the events that CSP attended to table or present at, and what events are on their calendar for the coming months
- I&R: the top 5 topics VDDHH was contacted about in the last quarter were for assistive technology, interpreting, hearing aids, American Sign Language (ASL) classes, and human and social services
- Staffing:
  - Hired family advisor
  - Deaf Mentor Coordinator position was recently reposted
  - 7 new deaf mentors were trained in March
- The new ASL packet and directory of services were distributed to board members
- VDDHH Open House will take place on September 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>

### **Interpreter Services – Karen Brimm, Manager**

- Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM): Ms. Brimm outlined her ongoing training, noted that VDDHH submitted their annual Agency Support Plan updates, and shared that Kathleen Frazier is serving as a back-up liaison and PIO
- Interpreter Steering Committee: VDDHH has established a small group of stakeholders to guide the development of future work groups that will collaborate with VDDHH to tackle the issues faced by the interpreting industry in Virginia
- Staffing: ISP hired a new interpreter coordinator that began in January
- Interpreter Request Modernization: ISP has been developing online interpreter request forms for state agencies and the courts; they are nearly live!
- Dr. Wolford asked if there is data to show how many interpreters work within the commonwealth
  - Ms. Brimm noted that there is currently no registration or certification requirement that would help us with counting the number of interpreters in the state. She encouraged the board to review the 2019 DPOR study that was provided to review the recommendations made in the conclusion

of the study. Ms. Brimm noted this would likely be a topic of discussion in the interpreter work groups in the future

- Ms. Branch noted her interest in joining the steering committee or work groups to provide the state perspective as her agency uses interpreters regularly

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

No additional discussion was posed.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

Dr. Wolford noted that the DMV representative that presented was unable to answer her questions from the previous meeting. Director Raff agreed that VDDHH would invite the DMV back to a future meeting to address the board's questions.

Mr. Winstead raised his previous request that Steve Gordon come to present at a future board meeting. Ms. Brimm noted that she will follow up with Mr. Gordon.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Chair Cline presented the proposed changes to the By-Laws that had been developed by the By-Laws Committee the day prior. The Board was encouraged to review the changes before the next meeting where the board will discuss and vote on the adoption of the changes.

## **BUDGET UPDATE**

Rhonda Jeter, Business Manager, provided updates on the current budget and budget development for next fiscal year.

State fiscal year 2026 will end on June 30.

- VDDHH receives three types of funding: general funds (GF), special funds (SF), federal funds; VDDHH is trying to spend down funds and close the gap, especially in GF
- One department/program is on spending target - Relay Administration (SF)
- Two are slightly underspent but are expected to be ok: Administration and QAS (GF)
- Some are more underspent: TAP, Interpreter Services, Community Services, and Deaf Mentor
- Factors:
  - TAP and Deaf Mentor programs have position vacancies that are hard to fill
  - ISP had a vacancy for 5 months but was able to fill it in January
  - TAP and CSP – three regions are not covered by contracts, as a result, VDDHH is not paying for those contractors which is creating a savings in both SF and GF
  - TAP – equipment is in transition to digital; some orders have been on hold
- Fiscal year is not over; several expensive invoices are on the horizon

Next fiscal year starts on July 1, ends on June 30, 2027

- The budget bill has not been finalized in the General Assembly
- If passed, VDDHH will add two full-time positions; we will have permission to add them but there is no funding attached to them
- Jeter will be developing budget for next year; we do not have numbers yet for the operating plan
- General fund appropriation is ok. GF will increase by \$57,000 if approved for administrative costs
- Special fund appropriation went down due to the decreased cost of the Virginia Relay
- Total decrease would be \$404,000 in SF if the bill passes.
- Federal fund appropriation decreased by \$76,000 as the SSP grant came to an end

**TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT**

Board members are reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses for their attendance. Overnight travelers are reimbursed for mileage and meals at the per diem rates (no receipts are required). Any board member can be reimbursed for mileage upon request. Pertinent travel forms were distributed and signed by the board members.

**MEETING ADJOURNMENT**

Being that there was no further business before the board, the meeting adjourned at 3:40 PM (Lipscomb/Nash).  
Motion carried.