

# CALLER

THE COMMONWEALTH

Virginia Relay: Telecommunications services for people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deafblind or have difficulty speaking

Summer 2022

## Congratulations, Christine!

Christine Ruderson has retired after 40 years' service with the Commonwealth of Virginia! Her life as a dedicated and loyal civil servant of the Commonwealth of Virginia began at the Department of Elections in 1982. Christine then transferred to the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) in March of 1987.

During her tenure at VDDHH, she served in many different capacities; Administrative Assistant (front desk), Interpreter Services Coordinator (ISP) and Virginia Quality Assurance Service Coordinator (VQAS). In April of 1997, she began coordinating the Technology Assistant Program (TAP) and continued in that role for the next 25 years. She was promoted to TAP Manager in 2017.

Christine has been with VDDHH for 35 years having the distinction of serving under five Directors and two Acting Directors. She has been a dedicated employee who holds everyone accountable for their performance.

We will miss her presence, her conversations and the aroma of her home cooked breakfasts and lunches. *Perhaps she may come to work with us again during retirement?* We take this opportunity to wish Christine the best in her new endeavors as she starts a new chapter in her life journey.



# MCU'S FIRST DEAF SUPERHERO



# MAKKARI

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) introduced its first Deaf superhero in *Eternals*. In an effort to be more inclusive, Disney has incorporated more diversity representation in the superheroes they introduce – including superheroes who are Deaf.

In 2021, the MCU introduced Makkari to the silver screen in the movie *Eternals*. Makkari is a member of the race of superhumans known as

*Eternals*. Makkari, played by Deaf actress Lauren Ridloff, is the first-ever Deaf superhero in the MCU. In the film, Makkari uses American Sign Language. She possesses superhuman speed, strength and reflexes.

*Eternals* was Lauren's first film and although she wasn't fazed by things that would unnerve others, she had to show filmmakers how to work with someone who is Deaf. Lauren, who has been

Deaf since birth, is working to break barriers and advocate for differently-abled people in the TV and film industry. Lauren has also brought awareness to the lack of accessibility to accurate captioning for people who are Deaf and hard of hearing at movie theatres.

If you haven't already watched Lauren Ridloff in *Eternals*, you can catch it on Disney+.

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## DC Deaf Moviegoers & Allies

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DC Deaf Moviegoers & Allies is a group for people in the Washington, DC area who benefit from or like open captioned movie

screenings. The deaf and hard of hearing community has long advocated for open captions at the movies. We invite friends, relatives, and

colleagues of all backgrounds to support this by going to open captioned movies and spreading the word about them.

# Virginia Deaf Culture Digital Library

After a two-year development process between the Central Rappahannock Regional Library and the Library of Virginia, the Deaf Culture Digital Library was established in 2021.

The Deaf Culture Digital Library aids and guides in resources about Deaf culture and includes an excellent collection of Deaf resources in digital formats. It provides assistance to Virginia residents and library staff in local public library systems, academic librarians in colleges and universities, and other

libraries in the state of Virginia.

People in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities are often over-looked in library services. Deaf Culture Digital Libraries allow for vital community resources and Deaf culture to be shared with relative ease. It can also help foster greater connection between public libraries and members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

ASL is currently the most studied language in colleges

and universities and the third-most frequently requested language for court interpretation.

The Virginia Deaf Culture Digital Library is made possible by funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and provides a user-friendly web development platform to Virginia libraries that need extra support.

To learn more, visit [deaflibva.org](http://deaflibva.org)

## FCC Affordable Connectivity Program

The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more. The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

### Who Is Eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program?

A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or if a member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline;

- Participates in Tribal specific programs, such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.
- Participates in the National School Lunch Program or the School Breakfast Program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision.
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income internet program.



## Exciting news from VDDHH!



Brooke Glanzmann has joined our team as the administrative assistant. The administrative assistant is the first to greet visitors and answer incoming calls as well as support VDDHH operations. Brooke brings prior experience working at the local YMCA. She began learning to fingerspell as a child, and her fascination over the years bloomed into a love of American Sign Language. She enrolled into the J. Sargeant Reynolds interpreter training program and will graduate soon. Welcome, Brooke!



We are pleased to announce that Amy Ashworth has been selected to be our new Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Coordinator! She brings thoughtful insights on the interpreting profession and demonstrates a passion and ambition to make a difference. Born and raised in Richmond, she started her professional journey at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB) in 2006 as a teacher assistant, intervener for the Deafblind, and recently an Independent Living Apartments instructor. In addition to her roles at VSDB, she has worked as a Deaf Interpreter. She is an alumna of Gallaudet University with a degree in Deaf Studies. Welcome, Amy!



Danielle Hubbard joins us as the new Interpreter Services Coordinator. Danielle has lived in Virginia her whole life and just moved to Richmond earlier this year. She started learning ASL in 2015 with her mom when she was informed by her doctor that she would become deaf within a few years. After taking classes together for a while, she began the ASL-English Interpreting program at J. Sargeant Reynolds. Since graduating in the summer of 2020, she has been working as an educational interpreter for a few different counties around the state. Welcome, Danielle!



Lynn Odom has joined the VDDHH team as the new Community Services Manager! She comes to Virginia from Seattle, Washington where she served six years as the State Coordinator of Deaf Services (SCD) with the Vocational Rehabilitation Services and has 30 years of experience as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and administrator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing agencies. She has an excellent background in training and educating government agencies and community programs. Welcome, Lynn!



VDDHH is pleased to introduce Brittany Howard as our new Technology Assistance Program (TAP) Manager. Brittany's involvement in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community started in elementary school when she was in a classroom with a handful of classmates who were deaf. Frustrated with the language barrier, she stayed after school to learn sign language from her third grade teacher. While studying at Gallaudet, Brittany worked as the Outreach Specialist at the disAbility Resource Center in Fredericksburg. Shortly after graduating, she joined VDDHH as the TAP Specialist Coordinator. In 2021, Brittany decided to try working as an educational interpreter. She enjoyed her time as an educational interpreter but greatly missed working at VDDHH. Welcome back, Brittany!

# Check out the newest Virginia Relay Partners!

In Virginia, there are thousands of people who are deaf, hard of hearing or who have difficulty speaking who count on Virginia Relay to connect with standard telephone users. Each day, hundreds of business calls are made through Virginia Relay. However, businesses that are unfamiliar with Virginia Relay may accidentally hang up on Relay callers, mistaking the call for a telemarketer.

**Virginia Relay Partner** is a free program designed to eliminate hang-ups that many Relay users experience by educating businesses on how to identify, receive and place Relay calls. Here are our newest Partners!

## **SARA (Sexual Assault Response & Awareness, Inc.)**

Roanoke, VA  
Hotline: 540-981-9352  
Office Phone: 540-345-7273  
sararoanoke.org

## **Virginia Department of Social Services**

Richmond, VA  
TTY Hotline: 800-828-1120  
Child Protective Services Hotline:  
804-786-8536  
Adult Protective Services Hotline:  
888-832-3858  
Website: dss.virginia.gov

## **Phoenix Project Front Royal, VA**

Hotline: 540-635-2300  
Office Phone: 540-635-2303  
Website: phoenix-project.org

To sign up to be a Relay Partner or to recommend a business for training, contact Virginia Relay Outreach Coordinator Eric Alvillar at [eric.alvillar@hamiltonrelay.com](mailto:eric.alvillar@hamiltonrelay.com).

## Tips and Tricks for Traveling with Hearing Loss

Traveling can be challenging — especially if you have hearing loss. These tips and tricks are just the ticket to make your adventures go safely and smoothly.

### **Before You Leave**

- Ask about disability discounts for you and a traveling companion. You may discover unadvertised deals on admissions to attractions, travel tickets and accommodations. Look for disability discounts online, too.
- Ask if there are hearing accessible hotel rooms available. Hearing accessible rooms are outfitted with visual or tactile alerts for the door, phone, alarm clock and fire alarm.
- Download the app for the airline or train you are using to receive notifications on your phone about your flight.
- Don't forget to pack extra hearing aid supplies such as batteries in your carry-on. You may also want to pack a waterproof travel case, a cleaning kit and a hearing aid drying kit, especially if you are going to a tropical area.
- Bring chargers with you in case you need to recharge your phone or other devices on the way to your destination. Bring an outlet converter if you are traveling internationally.
- Have your itinerary and

confirmation information on hand — both on your phone and on paper.

- Don't forget to carry paper and a pen in case your phone loses power and you need to write a note.

### **At the Airport**

- Tell security staff you are wearing or carrying hearing aids. Some electronics can set off airport security scanners.
- Let the gate agent or driver know that you have hearing loss. Ask him or her to let you know about important announcements. They may even offer you pre-boarding or priority seating.

### **On the Plane**

- Let a flight attendant or a seatmate know about your hearing loss and ask them to alert you of any important announcements.
- Don't worry about turning off your hearing aid or cochlear implant while on an airplane. Hearing aids and cochlear implants are not electronic devices that must be turned off during a flight.
- Turn off your personal FM system, if you have one.
- Adjust your hearing aids to reduce background noise during the flight.

### **At the Hotel**

- Let the front desk know you have hearing loss, in case there's an emergency.
- Keep your room key away from your hearing devices and phone to avoid demagnetizing the strip.
- Don't leave your hearing aid(s) behind—always be sure you have them before checking out.



## VDDHH Staff

**Eric Raff**

Director

**Rhonda Jeter**

Business Manager

**Brooke Glanzmann**

Administrative Assistant

**Felecia Payne**

Virginia Relay Manager

**Brittany Howard**

TAP Manager

**Lynn Odom**

Community Services Manager

**Paul Stuessy**

Community Services Specialist

**Karen Brimm**

Interpreter Programs Manager

**Danielle Hubbard**

Interpreter Services Coordinator

**Amy Ashworth**

Virginia Quality Assurance  
Screening (VQAS) Coordinator



Virginia Department for the  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing

**2022 VDDHH Advisory  
Board Meetings**

Wednesday, August 3

Wednesday, November 2

If you're attending any of these upcoming, be sure to stop by and say hello to our outreach team!

**Remote Area Medical**  
July 9-10 • Luray

**Black Pride RVA**  
July 16 • Richmond

**The ARC of Virginia State  
Convention**  
August 1-3 • Virginia Beach

**Annual Mid-Atlantic ADA  
Conference**  
October 11-13 • Alexandria

**Virginia Library Association  
Conference**  
October 19 • Norfolk

**Virginia Governor's Housing  
Conference**  
November 16-18 • Arlington

**Find Us on Facebook!**

Virginia Relay and VDDHH both have Facebook pages! Just type "Virginia Relay" or "VDDHH" in the search field and click the "Like" button at the top of the page to get regular updates on Virginia news, events and more.

