**meeting Minutes**

**Advisory board for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing**

September 6, 2019

**Member Attendees:**

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| **Member** | **Membership Role** | **Present** |
| Jeffrey Bravin | Executive Director of the American School for the Deaf or designee | Y |
| Barbara Cassin | A person who is deaf Co-Chair | N |
| Vacant | Educator who works with children who are deaf or hard of hearing | N/A |
| Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn | A person who is deaf and blind | Y |
| Colleen Hayles | Consultant Appointed by the State Board of Education in accordance with Section 10-316a or designee | Y |
| Sandra Inzinga | President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf or designee | Y |
| Marlene Jacques | A health care professional who works with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing | Y |
| Alexandra McGee | President of the Connecticut Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf or designee | N |
| MarySue Owens | An interpreting professional who serves deaf or hard of hearing persons | Y |
| Daniel Pinnell | Director of the CT Chapter of We the Deaf People | Y |
| Amy Porter | Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Co-Chair | Y |
| Mary Quirk | A person who is hard of hearing | Y |
| Sheri Romblad | A parent of a student at the American School for the Deaf | Y |
| Vacant | Governor's liaison to the disability community Co-Chair | N/A |
| Christina Stevens | President of the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or designee | Y |
| Susan Yankee | A parent of a student in a predominantly oral education program | Y |

**Invited Guests/Staff:** Representative Cathy Abercrombie, Khampasong Khantivong, Andrew Norton, - DORS, Kelly O’Connell, Soundbridge.

**Call to Order & Introductions**

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 by Amy Porter. The meeting started with a welcome to the group and an explanation of microphone usage for purposes of captioning. The Chair directed attention to the sign-up sheet for public comment on a timed, first-come, first-served basis at the end of the meeting as time allows. Introductions were made of the Board.

**Approval of Minutes**

Motion to accept minutes by Sheri Romblad, Mary Quirk seconded, and motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

* Legislative Agenda –
	+ Amy Porter briefly reviewed the successful legislative session, thanking everyone for their hard work, including Representative Abercrombie for her active engagement with the Board. Given this was the first year of the Board’s existence, the legislative session was a tremendous success.
	+ Representative Abercrombie agreed that the work of the Board and their discussions with members of the legislature did make a difference. She indicated that the Board has a lot to be proud of. The legislative process is not easy, but the Board is now on the radar which is positive. She added her thanks to the Board for all of its hard work.
	+ Susan Yankee thanked the Board members for their support during the legislative process. She also expressed concern that the new school year is starting and her son still did not have an emergency plan in place despite the language in House Bill 7353.
	+ Colleen Hayles will follow up and find out which Bureau will address the safety plan and send information to the chairs to distribute to the advisory board.
	+ In the meantime, Rep. Abercrombie offered to work with the Special Education Director in Meriden and to have a small meeting to address concerns.
	+ Colleen Hayles reiterated that this should be implemented through the Individualized Communication Plan for each student and to keep in mind everything is individualized.
	+ A number of Board members indicated interest in being involved in these discussions, including Sheri Romblad who indicated that parents need to be involved and Cristina Stevens who stressed the value of the role and perspective of an educational interpreter.
	+ Jeff Bravin talked about drafting checklists for the districts and suggested that maybe a coalition be started, to include the following people: members of this advisory board, parents, educational interpreters, teachers and students.
* Media Release Update –
	+ Amy Porter provided an update on the media release that was sent to all Connecticut media outlets on behalf of the Board. We have not received any inquiries at this point.
	+ Christina Stevens reported the FCC had new disability emergency info on TV requirements. She will email the group with the information.
	+ Jeff Bravin would like to figure out how we can approach the broadcast group in a different way to increase their awareness. He will do some further research to identify an appropriate contact.
* Proposed Amendment to Bylaws (public comment) – Vote Required
	+ Prior to discussion, Kelly O’Connor had a question regarding appointments for the Advisory Board. Jeff Bravin is listed as “Executive Director of the American School for the Deaf”, whereas Kelly is listed as “Educator who works with children who are deaf or hard of hearing”. She questioned whether this could be changed to Director of Soundbridge? Amy Porter explained that the membership of the Board is defined in statute, and this change would require a statutory change.
	+ Motion was made by MarySue Owens to accept the Proposed Amendment to Bylaws related to public comment. Seconded by Mary Quirk. Passed unanimously.

**New Business**

* Discussion about a Deaf-Blind Board:
	+ Lisa Flaherty Vaughn commented on the need to increase support for the Deaf-Blind Community. She proposed a review of terminology, and Sandy Inzinga supported this idea with both of them introducing the term Co-Navigator. Lisa would like this advisory board to make suggestions to the Deaf-Blind Advisory Board that advises the Department of Rehabilitation Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB).
	+ Andrew Norton provided some background on the Deaf-Blind Advisory Board and its role in advising on community inclusion services.
	+ A motion was made by Sandy Inzinga to invite representatives from BESB. to our next meeting. Seconded by Daniel Pinnell. Unanimously passed. Amy Porter reminded members that BESB is one of the bureaus under DORS and requested that members send their questions and issues to her to compile and put them together for the BESB representative.
* Mental Health Bill of Rights –
	+ Jeff Bravin commented that Arkansas recently passed a very good Mental Health Bill, and would like to start a committee to begin the conversation on how to get similar services for CT. If folks are interested in working on this committee, please send Jeff an email. When the committee is ready, they can present to this Advisory Board. This is open to anyone.
	+ Representative Abercrombie suggested it might helpful to introduce a bill to formally introduce the idea. This would create an opportunity for a public hearing, allowing the community to say this is currently happening. This would allow for the Advisory Board to consider more specific language for the legislative session that begins in January 2021.
* Disability Rights CT
	+ Gretchen Knauff, Executive Director of Disability Rights CT, was in attendance to answer questions from the Board. Disability Rights CT (DRCT) is a federally funded agency with a focus on Protection and Advocacy for persons with disabilities. DRCT feels that they are unable to assist in being the repository for interpreter complaints, as it was stated in the Interpreter Bill that recently passed. DRCT operates as a law firm. They manage lawsuits on behalf of individuals, file complaints, answer questions. For example, DRCT would investigate if a Sign Language interpreter was not provided for a meeting when the accommodation had been requested; however, their role is to not judge the quality of the interpreter and their expertise does not lie in that area.
	+ Representative Abercrombie agreed with Gretchen’s sentiment and went through the initial thought process of where interpreter complaints should go. She discussed the fact that this year’s budget included funding for a part-time position within DORS to better understand the number and nature of the complaints. Because DRCT is currently listed as the gatekeeper, the statute will need to be changed.
* DORS Budget
	+ Commissioner Porter followed up on the previous discussion by announcing that there is funding in the budget to enhance deaf and hard of hearing services in the state. This includes funding that DORS can use to enhance their contracts with the Centers for Independent Living by specifically addressing services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as a position at DORS itself. It has not yet been determined whether this will be a full-time position or part-time. She posed the question about the best role for this position and indicated that she would like the Board’s input on the functional job description. This can be an interim solution for the state.
	+ Sandra Inzinga raised the question of where would interim complaints go? She reminded the Board that the initial legislative proposal included a Standards Board, but that piece did not pass.
	+ Jeff Bravin asked if the new role had to be within DORS or could it be a contracted position. The concern is finding a quality person who would want to work part-time.
	+ Representative Abercrombie indicated that this was not the legislative intent. She indicated that the position should be in a state agency and needs to collect and report on the data. This can help us decide what we need to do in the future once we find out what the issues are.
	+ Mary Quirk indicated that a part-time position is a good place to start, and we can build on that in the future.
	+ Amy Porter responded to further questions about the role, and whether it would focus only on complaints. She indicated that conversations within the community point toward a role that is more of a navigator, helping people understand where they might go for the various types of complaints. She also indicated that these complaints are not currently coming to her office.
	+ Marlene Jacques agreed that this role makes sense and also reminded the board that the issues are not just about access, they are about accessing culturally appropriate linguistic services.
	+ Christina Stevens identified a number of categories of potential complaints that the position could track:
1. Interpreter is not registered with DORS,
2. Interpreter is not certified,
3. Interpreter was not provided,
4. Interpreter did not match needs,
5. Interpreter did not follow RID Code of Professional Conduct,
6. Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) Complaints
7. If the issue is with the referral agency or the interpreter themselves. Did the agency send the wrong person, or am I complaining about the interpreter? Was this under RFP or under state agency?
	* A number of Board members indicated that the staff person should know sign language.
	* Amy Porter encouraged Board members to reach out if they had further thoughts on this position.
* DAS Interpreting Services Request for Proposal
	+ Jeff Bravin brought up concerns about the DAS Request for Proposal, specifically around cancellation policies. He asked for the concerns to be shared.
	+ Amy Porter indicated that this proposal is not under DORS, and that DORS cannot address the concerns. She also indicated that she would be willing to share his concerns if he could articulate them in an email.

**Public Comment**

* Rachel Spillane –
	+ Encouraged the Board to look at other states/organizations to see what template is out there to receive and document complaints. She indicated that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. We can look at MCDHH, NAD, RID, etc. The data collection piece mentioned by Christina is important. Expressed her concerns over Interpreter Bill that had recently passed regarding certifications of interpreters, medical vs. general, vs. educational. Those interpreters who can register as a result of the Massachusetts MCDHH screening can only interpret in general settings.
* Pat Clark –
	+ Asked about the DAS Request for Proposal and the time period to submit questions. She indicated that there was a question and answer document, and the answer referenced changes in the document but those changes were not made available in the Question and Answer document.

**Announcements**

1. Amy Porter announced as of October 1st, DORS’ new name will be the Department of Aging and Disability Services, or ADS. Rep. Abercrombie added that DORS’ name change was not the agency’s decision to make, rather a legislative change meant to reflect all the services DORS offers.
2. Amy Porter also provided a brief update on the request from Legislative Management for the Board’s support in a captioning procurement. An email was distributed to Board members and we had three people who volunteered to work with Legislative Management. We can get an update for the next meeting.

**Next Meeting Date**

December 6, 2019, 10:00 to 12:00

**Adjournment**

Sheri Romblad made a motion and Mary Quirk seconded to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously and meeting adjourned at 12:01.