

**BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL REGULATION
STAKEHOLDER MEETING – SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER LICENSURE STUDY**

MINUTES

The Stakeholder group made up of representatives from the Virginia Department of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH), and citizen members/advocates from the deaf community, met on Monday, September 23, 2019, at the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation, 9960 Mayland Drive, Richmond, Virginia.

The following people were present for all or part of the meeting:

Traci Branch, VDDHH
Karen Brimm, VDDHH
Rev. Fritz Koehring, Citizen Member
Eric Raff, Director, VDDHH
Jenny Witteborg, Citizen Member

Sign language interpreters for the meeting were:

Emily Haynes
Christina Jacob

The following agency staff was present for all or part of the meeting:

Kathleen (Kate) R. Nosbisch, Executive Director
Amy Goobic, Executive Assistant
Matt McCabe, Program & Special Projects Analyst

Ms. Nosbisch called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.

Call to Order

Ms. Nosbisch welcomed guests and audience members. Members of the panel, interpreters, and audience members introduced themselves. Ms. Nosbisch stated that invited guests Tressela Bateson, Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Ethical Practices System Administrator; and Ken Elks, citizen member/advocate, were unable to attend and sent their regrets.

**Welcome and
Introductions**

Ms. Nosbisch and members of the panel reviewed the agenda.

Review of Agenda

There was no public comment.

Public Comment

Ms. Nosbisch provided information on the four public hearings held in Norfolk, September 4, Fairfax, September 6, Richmond, September 9, and Roanoke, September 11.

Public Hearings Review

Ms. Nosbisch reported there were 51 attendees combined for the four hearings; and 30 commenters. There were three comments made on the Virginia Town Hall Public Comment online forum. Additionally, Ms. Nosbisch received ten emails, and one video log (VLOG).

Discussion was held on the role VDDHH has for providing sign language interpreters. Mr. Raff clarified that VDDHH maintains a list of interpreters for procurement by state agencies, the courts, the General Assembly, and non-profits. Ms. Nosbisch inquired if citizens contacted VDDHH for interpreter recommendations. Mr. Raff explained that deaf citizens typically do not request interpreters, they request, for example, the business to provide an interpreter, and the business will provide services as required following ADA guidelines. In the case of a personal event (wedding, party, etc.) a deaf citizen may personally hire an interpreter.

**Virginia Department of
Deaf and Hard of
Hearing**

Ms. Nosbisch inquired whether VDDHH receives complaints about interpreters. Mr. Raff stated that VDDHH does not have the ability to investigate. They recommend asking if interpreter is Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certified, if so, then contact them. Mr. Raff added that there is really no recourse, many interpreters are outside the scope of VDDHH. Ms. Witteborg added that the National Association of the Deaf is developing a code of professional conduct. Panel members also discussed the RID, explaining that it is not a governmental agency, but a membership and certification. RID could revoke a certification due to a complaint, the interpreter would still be able to practice in Virginia. Tressela Bateson, RID EPS Administrator, previously indicated to Ms. Nosbisch, approximately five complaints a month are filed with RID.

Discussion was held on private agencies that provide interpreting services. Panel members said that many businesses, hospitals, etc. will have exclusive contracts with private agencies and the interpreters they employ may or may not be certified or qualified.

Discussion was held on what constitutes a "qualified interpreter." Ms. Witteborg stated an interpreter should be able to handle subject, communicate effectively, while bridging the cultural gap. Ms. Brimm added that the definition is basically left up to the states, and that is where the variations can happen.

"Qualified Interpreter"

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the RID defines "qualified interpreter" as: one "who is able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary."

Discussion was held on interpreters in the school systems. Panel members discussed "qualified interpreters" with regard to the education system. Ms. Branch commented that many children get lost in the system, as the schools do not follow requirements, or don't understand the requirements. Ms. Witteborg commented that often school districts do not ensure the interpreter has the appropriate Educational Interpreter

**Interpreters in the
Education System**

Performance Assessment (EIPA). Mr. Raff explained an interpreter could pass the EIPA for elementary age children and then go on to interpret for high school age – the level of understanding and interpreting is different. Ms. Nosbisch asked who enforces the standards for interpreters in the school systems. Ms. Branch said that it is the school board’s responsibility, parents must file a complaint about the school. Unfortunately, most parents don’t know to do that.

Ms. Nosbisch inquired about statistics for the number of deaf and hard of hearing in Virginia. Ms. Brimm stated that statistics are hard to get due to the different levels of hearing loss, and there is nothing included in the census. Ms. Witteborg provided statistic from National Institute of Health (NIH), that 0.01% of babies are born deaf. Ms. Branch stated that in 2018 there were approximately 700 deaf/hard of hearing students in ages 14-22 in Virginia. She added that the use of interpreting is huge.

**Number of Citizens in
Virginia Requiring Sign
Language Services**


Ms. Nosbisch stated that she would like to get the best possible estimate of deaf and hard of hearing to include in the study. Mr. Raff said there were three approaches to obtaining statistics – NIH, Gallaudet University and the US Census. He added there are between 10,000 and 30,000 using interpreter services in Virginia. Ms. Branch agreed to work on providing additional statistics from Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to include in the study.

Mr. McCabe added that when the Sign Language Interpreter study was done by the Board over ten years ago, there were 165 nationally certified interpreters in Virginia, there are less now. He stated there are 146 certified with RID, VDDHH has 119 on their list of providers.

Discussion was also held on Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). Panel members stated VRI is used often in hospitals, and the interpreters could be anywhere. Rev. Koehring stated there is a difference between what is mandated and what the deaf person needs. VRI has their own screening process and is not monitored.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

Adjourn


Shelly Simonds, Chair

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Mary Broz-Vaughan, Director