

North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Quarterly Meeting

November 1, 2024, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Central Pines Regional Center

4307 Emperor Blvd, Suite 110

Durham, NC 27703

Members Present:

Christina Armfield
Linda Amato
Ashley Benton
Antwan Campbell
Michael Evola
Greta Knigga-Daugherty
Stephen Latus
Mike Lupo
Dr. Robert C Nutt
Randall Pope
Laurie Ann Rook
David Rosenthal
Donald Tinsley Sr
Jennifer Woodard

Ex Officio:

Jan Withers (Present)

Liaison:

Kim Harrell (Absent)

Members Absent:

Kathy Dowd
Kevin Earp
Rebecca Freeman
Frank Griffin
Pattie Griffin
Betty Kelly
Rep. Ya Liu
Senator Bill Rabon
Rep. Diane Wheatley

Current Vacant Council Seat(s)

Senate Appointees (2)- President Pro Tempore

Governor Appointees

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by David Rosenthal, Chair.

Welcome; Introductions; Ethics Reminder; Approve Minutes from May 3rd, 2024.

Motion #1: Christina Armfield (Donald Tinsley) moved to approve the minutes from the May 3rd, 2024, Council meeting. **Motion Passed.**

None of the members acknowledged having a conflict of interest or appearance on matters listed on this agenda.

David Rosenthal, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and new location. He states that this location will be our new space moving forward.

Response to Hurricane Helene

Jan Withers, Director, Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Chris Egan, Assistant Secretary for Employment and Inclusion, DHHS

Jan Withers, Director, Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Our Asheville and Morganton regional center were affected by Hurricane Helene directly, and they both were closed temporarily, but they are back online now and in business. One government agency lost a staff member, and others lost their consumers. Based on record, which came out earlier this week, 25 counties of North Carolina were impacted, and we have lost over 100 people due to Hurricane Helene. Our first mission as DSDHH was to reach out to our consumers in impacted areas to make sure we meet our expected customer assistance; we will keep trying to reach out to those who did not respond. Please review our record below:

- Contacted 27 DeafBlind individuals, all of them responded. Six of them asked for immediate assistance.
- Contacted 64 vulnerable deaf individuals who may have secondary disabilities; 58 responded. Eight of them asked for some assistance.
- Contacted 107 vulnerable hard of hearing consumers, and 56 of them responded. Five of them did ask for help.

DSDHH Partnership in Response to Hurricane Helene with Other Agencies and Organizations

Our efforts and responses to Hurricane Helene involve a lot of partnerships with various organizations and agencies; you can find a list of them below:

- North Carolina Emergency Management Disability Integration
- Disability Disaster Group (It is a group of different agencies that serve people with disabilities)
- FEMA Region 4 Hurricane Coordination
- Sister Agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services
- Various Private Entities

Our emergency preparedness coordinator, Donna Platt, attends all meetings of the above organizations and agencies. Donna receives reports from North Carolina emergency management very frequently. She's then able to share those reports with key staff in our division, and those reports reflect the intense analysis of the counties. The military has developed an incident command system structure; it is very detailed, with a specific structure that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the group, which offers an expedited, efficient response to the disaster. North Carolina DSDHH is the first state agency to create a full-time statewide Emergency Preparedness Coordinator position, and we are very fortunate that we have developed resources specifically for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind community and update them often; these resources can be found in the DSDHH website. We adopted an incident command system structure to our internal DSDHH response to Hurricane Helene. Our DSDHH Disaster Core Team had various roles as follows:

- **Incident Command:** Held by Jan Withers.
- **Safety Officer:** This position is responsible for staff safety, especially those impacted directly by the disaster.
- **Public information Officer:** A public information officer is a person who makes videos of individuals, passing on information and posting it on Facebook, making sure that our Facebook site has current, updated information from emergency management or the governor to pass on. They also help develop our web page with all the information we wanted to share.
- **Liaison Officer:** This position ties in with different agencies and organizations, like North Carolina Emergency Management.
- **Planning Chief:** That's the person responsible for all the planning to ensure that roles are coordinated within our system, that everyone is working together moving forward, and that everyone is applying actions as well.
- **Logistics Chief:** That's the person responsible for coordinating between the Regional Centers and the Home Office to ensure that the Regional Centers have the resources they need to respond to the disaster in the field.
- **Unit Leaders**
 - **Communication Access:** This position ensures that we have proper interpreters and provide needed communication access where needed. For example, they worked closely with North Carolina Emergency Management.
 - **Equipment Distribution:** This person would be responsible for providing loaners for connecting them with regional audiologists who are willing to assist individuals who need equipment due to disaster.
 - **Support Service Providers (SSP):** Follow up with our Support Service Providers to ensure they are safe and to see if they can provide services.
- **Finance Chief:** The finance chief ensures we have the funds needed to respond.

Please do check our website. We have a web page specific to the hurricane and resources we want to share with you all.

Chris Egan, Assistant Secretary for Employment and Inclusion, DHHS

I want to share more about our coordinated response to Hurricane Helene and then share several other significant accomplishments of the past year at the departmental level, including Medicaid expansion and other things, along with strategic priorities. It was and indeed is unprecedented, which has meant a strong response has been needed to tackle this; it's incredible and remarkable how much has come together and how many people and organizations are remarkably quickly in place to attempt to respond to this as rapidly as possible. Let me review some information about the higher level regarding what we've been trying to manage and are successfully progressing.

Challenges we have faced due to Hurricane Helene:

- There were more than 500,000 power outages.
- 650 roads were closed at the height of the devastation.
- More than 150 drinking water systems were on a boil water advisory.

- Over half of the 267 wastewater treatment plants in the affected region had significant damage or operational challenges after the storm.
- As of October 28th, we knew 99 storm-related fatalities had been reported across 22 counties.

DHHS Response to Hurricane Helene:

- All divisions were trying to find people to check on them and determine what they needed.
- Provided for basic needs like food, safe water, shelter, ensure access to critical health services, etc.
- Staff proactively connected with vulnerable individuals in the affected region.
- Identified 23,411 medically vulnerable people, including 11,576 people in the affected region who are living at home and rely on electrically dependent Medical Devices.
- Worked with the prepaid health plans to reach out to these individuals to see what help they may need.
- In partnership with social services offices, we contacted 100% of the 2,667 children in foster care and 100% of adult guardianship placements in affected regions.
- Mental and Behavioral Health concerns throughout the immediate response and longer-term recovery phase has continued and will continue to be a critical focus for the department.
- Hosted daily emergency management disability integration calls by DHHS.

DHHS Accomplishments During Past Year:

So much has happened over the past year, and so many successes have been accomplished at the departmental level. Please see some highlighted ones as follows:

- **Medicaid Expansion**
 - December 1st, 2023, Medicaid expansion went live.
 - More than 550,000 North Carolinians are enrolled and have access to good health insurance and medical care.
 - On July 1st, North Carolina Medicaid launched the tailored plan, a new type of managed care plan to address the needs of people with complex health concerns and health needs, including severe mental illness, serious substance use disorders, as well as intellectual and developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries.
 - On August 15th, 2024, North Carolina Medicaid announced Blue Cross/Blue Shield North Carolina as the selected partner to operate the children and family specialty plan.
- **Community and partner engagement initiative**
 - This initiative ensures that the voices of North Carolina communities and families continue to be at the center of the department's work.
 - The initiative provides tools to facilitate community engagement and identifies how people can get involved with the department's work.
- **Historical Investment for North Carolina General Assembly**

- A historic investment of \$835 million was needed for the North Carolina General Assembly.
 - This will help us continue to transform North Carolina's behavioral health system.
 - It was released in September 2024.
- **Strong Emphasis on Addressing Hearing Loss**
 - DSDHH Partnership with Division of Aging's Aging plan.

State Government Transition

Chris Egan, Assistant Secretary for Employment and Inclusion, DHHS

Jan Withers, Director, Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Chris Egan, Assistant Secretary for Employment and Inclusion, DHHS

As we near a change in administration and our next Governor, DHHS and each division have been hard at work to create a transition resource manual that includes the departmental description, mission, overarching work, and a description of all major divisions and supporting structures across the department, these resources cover various topics and details such as:

- Legal Authority
- Major Statutes
- Federal and State Interactions
- Engagement and Partnership with Key Agencies
- Number of employees
- Vacancy rates
- DHHS-related boards and commissions
- Summary of the budget
- Department and Division, description of primary revenue streams
- State funds, federal funds, block grants
- DHHS priorities and key performance indicators

Services for the deaf and hard of hearing prepared their specific summary by what I just reviewed. As you know, in addition to these transition efforts, we're also working to support a strong transition for Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing with the upcoming retirement of their director. Our mission is to manage and navigate this transition and have the right support to ensure continued success. The director position for DSDHH has been posted and recently closed, we have been reviewing the applicants, and we've scheduled and started interviews for that position. Jan has worked hard over the years to recruit, retain, and continue to develop an excellent team, so regardless of the possible changes, surely the team will continue the focus and level of excellence already in place at the division. Lastly, I do want to mention the North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is a source of support to North Carolina in maintaining its focus on meeting the needs of people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind in North Carolina.

Jan Withers, Director, Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

I have already informed my staff that I plan on retiring on February 1st. The goal is to hopefully have some overlap during January with the new director and me. I also want to thank all of you

here at the council for your continued support. The next council meeting will be on February 7th, so that's past my retirement date, and I will not be in attendance. I want to emphasize to all of you that you bring immense expertise and experience to this group, which is vital for the agencies serving North Carolina's Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals, including EIPD, formerly known as vocational rehabilitation, as well as mental health services. You advise them all and sustain the wonderful work that you do. Thank you so much.

**Report Updates:
David Rosenthal, Chair**

The report on the updates is the agenda portion we added recently to keep everyone aware of what's happening.

- **Common Ground Meeting:** We met on October 4th in Burlington, NC. It was very good session, and most of our members showed up. We discussed what success would like for children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The highlighted meeting outcomes are as follows:
 - We covered DPI's implementation of House Bill 317, from its inception until now.
 - We also talked about the birth-to-three age group as a concept and how that could be integrated into HB 317 in the future. One thing we're working on now is developing a clear picture of what exactly would be included, including birth to three.
 - Another point of discussion was adding children without IEPs to the law and logistical barriers to including them. We decided to set up a subcommittee with the people from Part C to discuss how that would work.

- **August Council Meeting Motion Results:** I want to update you on the status of those motions we had in our previous meeting on August 2nd, 2024. All written letters were sent out around September, but I have yet to get any responses from them as of today, November 1st, 2024. The letters that we sent out were as follows:
 - A letter was sent to the North Carolina Board of Elections asking for any issues or complaints from the deaf, hard-of-hearing community about access to voting.
 - A letter was sent to the UNC system, UNC Greensboro, and the Institute of Higher Education about continuing UNCG's IDEAS program.
 - A letter was sent to the Department of Public Instruction requesting information about teacher licensure for B-K, and policies and regulations for the pre-K program in North Carolina.

- **Meeting Location for 2025:** Central Pines Regional Center in Durham will be our meeting space unless you hear otherwise.

[The Council broke into two groups at 10:30 a.m. and reconvened at 2:30 p.m.]

Summary of Group Discussions and Outcomes:

Group One Focused on:

- **Language development/deprivation for Deaf, DeafBlind, & Hard of Hearing children from birth to 5 years of age.**
- **Educational/Preschool programs for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing children from 3 to 5 years old.**
- **Teacher of the Deaf retention/shortage in NC.**

Group One Members: Linda Amato, Christina Armfield, Antwan Campbell, Greta Knigga-Daugherty, Michael Lupo, Jennifer Woodard.

Facilitator: Jennifer Woodard

Reporting: Jennifer Woodard

We had a recap from our August council meeting and came up with the following problems/needs, solutions, and action items:

List of Concerns and Issues:

- Lack of B-K/Deaf and Hard of Hearing dually certified teachers.
- Lack of K-12 Deaf/Hard of Hearing certified teachers.
- Issues that we are facing to serving children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing due to lack of certified teachers in our schools.
- Need of another position in the council in support of current positions.

Steps to Resolve These Concerns and Issues:

- Discussed licensure requirements for teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, birth, kindergarten and K through 12.
- Adding another council member will involve changes to the law. Therefore, we would have representatives present here as consistent attendees; they won't be part of the council itself but will serve as a voice in the discussion room. We would like to invite representatives from both groups serving zero to three and three to five years of age, including Marcia Fort and Ruth Anne Everett, to attend the next council meeting to discuss the flow of services between Part C and Part B coverage.

Action Items:

- Invite representatives from both groups that serve zero to three and three to five years of age, including Marcia Fort and Ruth Anne Everett, to attend the next council meeting to discuss the flow of services between Part C and Part B coverage.

Group Two Focused on:

- **Quality and Reliability of VRI in Hospitals**
- **All Open Meetings of Municipal, County, & State Governments provide ASL interpreters/real-time captioning and CART services.**
- **Systematic racism and social injustice within the NC Deaf community**

Group Two Members: Ashley Benton, Michael Evola, Stephen Latus, Randall Pope, Laurie Rook, Donald Tinsley.

Facilitator: Michael Evola

Reporter: Michael Evola

As a Community Access Committee, we reviewed our topic and identified some issues and concerns that our Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities face in different situations. We discussed some solutions and decided on action items to share with the council to address them:

List of Concerns and Issues:

- Telehealth accessibility and communication access in healthcare systems.
- Training in healthcare settings is needed to provide effective communication and quality assurance to deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing consumers.
- VRI accessibility and some issues associated with it.
- VRI licensure requirements are not the same as that of community-based interpreters.

Steps to Resolve These Issues and Concerns:

- We did receive a letter from the North Carolina Interpreter and Transliterators Licensing Board. This is a response to a recent inquiry with the licensure board regarding VRI interpreters.
- The licensure board will be looking into making changes to the law to ensure that interpreters in educational settings are the same as community-based interpreters.
- Responding to the licensure board, mentioning that we fully support the licensure board's efforts and initiatives regarding updating the requirements for ASL interpreting for educational settings and VRI, and suggested to the licensure board that we create some joint committee to collaborate on this together.
- Ensuring that this council has a seat at the table and representation in these discussions of potentially having the law changed with the licensure board
- Recommending DSDHH send out a survey to their consumers and collect data with those consumers about their experiences with VRI services.
- We also recommend that DSDHH develop more opportunities for training on how the public can better self-advocate for themselves regarding training and resources and utilizing different tools for the entities themselves.
- Establishing a subcommittee to continue developing the scope of what a website for the council would be.
- Requesting DSDHH make short introductory videos of council members telling their stories and giving info about the council to encourage recruitment of future council members, the council's purpose, and the benefits of participation on the council.
- Recommending the Governor's office make active efforts to fill council vacancies.
- Recommending DSDHH advertise council vacancies in their newsletter and social media.

Action Items:

- Respond to the letter that the Council received from the North Carolina interpreter and transliterator licensing board, stating our full support in their initiatives and efforts regarding updating their requirements for ASL interpreting, educational settings, and VRI. We would also recommend we create some joint task force between the licensure board and our council to ensure that our council has a seat at the table and representation in these discussions of potentially changing the law.

- Recommend DSDHH make short introductory videos of council members telling their stories about themselves and giving details about the council to encourage recruitment for any potential vacancies and inform the public about what we do as a council.
- Recommend DSDHH create a sheet of communication accommodations and share it with municipalities, local governments, and the rest.

Council Feedback, Updates, and Wrap Up

David Rosenthal, Chair

Thank you, everyone, for your patience and work. Thank you for addressing the issues and offering suggestions to serve our community better. Council members have the right to implement a working committee in between Quarterly Council meetings to study the problems, develop proper recommendations, and make a motion for specific action to occur.

- **Motion #1:** Michael Evola (Donald Tinsley) moved the Council to send a letter in response to the letter from the North Carolina Interpreter and Transliterator Licensing Board stating our full support of their initiatives and efforts regarding updating their requirements for ASL interpreting for educational settings and VRI. We would also recommend we create a joint task force between the licensure board and our council to ensure that our council has a seat at the table and representation in these discussions of potentially changing the law. **Motion Carried.**
- **Motion #2:** Michael Evola (Donald Tinsley) moved that the Council ask DSDHH to make short intro videos of council members telling their stories about themselves and giving details about the council to encourage recruitment for any potential vacancies, as well as to inform the public about what we do as a council. **Motion Carried.**
- **Motion #3:** Michael Evola (Ashley Benton) moved that DSDHH create a sheet of communication accommodations and share it with municipalities, local governments, and the rest. **Motion Carried.**
- **Motion #4:** Jennifer Woodard (Antwan Campbell) moved the Council invite Marcia Fort and Ruth Anne Everett to our next meeting. **Motion Carried.**

Announcements:

- 988 is a free hotline for crisis calls for the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services. This hotline is accessible and can be reached by phone call, text, or chat through the website, and now they offer a direct ASL line.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

2025 Meetings: February 7th, May 2nd, August 1st, November 8th
<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dsdhh/councils-commissions>