

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

May 1, 2026, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Central Pines Regional Center

4307 Emperor Blvd, Suite 110

Durham, NC 27703

Members Present:

Senator Gale Adcock

Keila E. Armas

Dr. Christina Armfield

Dara Baril

Stephanie Bland

Antwan Campbell

Michael Evola, Council Chair

Frank Griffin

Stephen Latus

Mike Lupo

Robert C Nutt, MD, MPH

Randall Pope

Laura Robison

Laurie Rook

David Rosenthal

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Donald Tinsley, Sr

Caylee Weaver

Ex Officio:

Tony Davis (Present)

Members Absent:

Dr. Jessica West

Jennifer Woodard AuD

Representative Brian Turner

Senator Chris Measmer

**Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 9:07am by Chair Michael Evola
Welcome, and Ethics Reminder: Approval Minutes from February 6, 2026**

Chair Evola welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending.

Mission and Vision statement that was adopted by Council in 2025:

“Our mission is to improve the health, education and wellbeing of North Carolinians who are deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind by partnering with and advising the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Public Instruction to ensure effective, high quality and accessible programs and services. Our vision is to be the leader in public services innovation, interagency cooperation and Adirondack vote Casey for the communities we serve. Let this mission and vision guide us in the work that this council does. So, in accordance with state law, it is the duty of every council member to avoid conflicts of interest.

None of the members acknowledged having a conflict of interest or appearance on matters listed on this agenda when asked, and Chair Evola then invited Vice Chair Hope Turpin to talk about the communication access rules and guidelines for the meeting.

Communication Access Guidelines Reminder

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Vice Chair, Turpin Turner reviewed the communication access rules and guidelines for the meeting.

Approval of the Previous Meeting Minutes

Michael Evola, Council Chair

Motion #1: Donald Tinsley (Senator Adcock) made a motion to approve minutes From February 6, 2026. **Motion Passed**

**Office of Language and Communication Access (OLCA)
Bethany Wagner, OLCA Manager**

OLCA created to make state government accessible. Accessibility isn't measured in one specific way.

- Physical Accessibility
- Language Access
- Communication Access
- Digital Access

These four accessibility areas are often separated by the State government even though they are connected.

- The OLCA brings the four access areas to NC Department of Health and Human Services partners so **ALL** can access government.
- The OLCA consults and trains, and during training we teach how to embed access into planning and budgeting.
- The OLCA focuses on embedding access to DHHS divisions, Secretary's office and the Commission on Accessibility.

On March 18, 2026, Governor Stein announced the Commission on Accessibility

- OLCA will move to the Governors office and work with all departments with NC
- OLCA is named in Executive Order 35 and Department of Administration (DOA) Press Release
- Bethany Wanger will be serving on language access pillar
- First meeting May 6, 2026

The OLCA Transition

- OLCA will still be in Employment and Community Access portfolio
- OLCA will have access to all divisions in the Employment Community Access portfolio
 - OLCA will continue to interface with DSDHH while having regular contact with seven additional divisions

OLCA wants to bring NCDHHS divisions together so they can make lasting accessibility changes

Education Committee Workgroup Session- Report

Jennifer Woodard, Aud, Committee Chair

Committee Members: Senator Gale Adcock, Stephanie Bland, Christina Armfield, Antwan Campbell, Frank Griffin, Mike Lupo, Robert Nutt MD., Laurie Rook, Representative Brain Turner, Vice Chair Hope Turpin Turner, Keila E. Armas Velasquez, Tony Davis, Rey Castillo, Greta Knigga-Daugherty

Motion #1

For DPI to provide data and information pertaining to Session Law 2013-119 be presented to the Council in a way that is understandable within 30 days - if not able to gather this data, then provide an explanation and plan to report this information. (David Rosenthal), **Motion carries**

- Language outcomes for students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Situation with a statewide overview
- Standardization of language as it pertains to assessment and eligibility
- How many students have hearing loss?
- How is DPI utilizing the data for improvement?
- How many ToDeaf/hard of Hearing are in NC? Site based vs itinerant
- What assessment recommendations are being shared with districts?
- Who is completing the assessments if there is no ToD/HH?
- Identify limitations or barriers for data collection throughout the state
- How many sign language interpreters in the state?
- How many Spoken Language Facilitators?

Christina Armfield rescinds Motion #1 and moves forward with Motion #2, (David Rosenthal) Motion carries

Note: Point of order, if two motions are on the floor, first motion cannot be rescinded without a second on the rescinding for the motion for that to be removed from the floor.

Motion #2

DPI and DHHS with the assistance of the Governor's Council of the formulation of a task force committee to focus specifically on educational advancement for students who are deaf/hard of hearing. To include but not limited to determining appropriate data sets to be collected, service provisions within districts, improved utilization of the communication plan worksheet, potential dashboard creation that is public facing, and outcomes for students who are D/HH.

- Frank Griffin moved to amend Motion #2 to state that DPI and DHHS with the assistance of the Governor's council in creating a task force and include individual recommended by the Council on that task force, (Christina Armsfield) **Motion carried**

Accessibility Committee Workgroup Session- Report

Laura Robison, Committee Chair

Committee Members: Dara Baril, Chair Michael Evola, Senator Chris Measmer, Randy Pope, David Rosenthal, Donald Tinsley, Caylee Weaver, Jessica West, PhD., Steven Latus, Representative Paul Scott

Entire workgroup session, David Payne Communication Access Manager, DSDHH answered questions submitted by the committee

Please share about the DSDHH Interpreter Mentorship Program?

- Mentoring program designed to help maintain and build skills
- 2nd cohort 2019-2021
 - Mentored provisional interpreters for 3 months
 - Review videos
- Deaf Language Program pilot to help with ASL skill building⁷⁷

What projects or potential solutions related to increasing the number of interpreters in North Carolina are DSDHH working on? Please list them as a priority.

- no programs currently

What are DSDHH's projections for the interpreting field in North Carolina for 2030, 2050?

- No projections to date because no data. There is a possible lack of new professionals to fulfil need in future but no data. BIPOC interpreters is a need. Looking at trying to gather data about interpreting issues, such as qualified interpreters, vs in person vs remote etc.

Please discuss how community college ITPs are working with colleges and universities to ensure credit transfers?

- Community Colleges and 4-year schools are working together on a curriculum alignment project so credits can transfer and there is no need for an additional 3-4 years of training

Are students effectively supported in transitioning from associate-level to bachelor's-level credentials?

- Currently there is no standard curriculum for ASL classes

Are current programs adequately preparing students to meet licensure and certification requirements?

- 4-year college graduates are better prepared than 2-year graduates. COVID has hurt interpreter preparedness as virtual programs are being pushed but students aren't getting experience working in front of people

What internship opportunities are available for new interpreters?

- Currently colleges don't have standards for internships and don't help students find those opportunities

Are there workforce development incentives (e.g., scholarships, loan forgiveness, apprenticeships) specifically targeted at interpreter recruitment?

- Less scholarships and grants available but trying to increase

How does North Carolina compare with other states with similar population numbers as far as the number of interpreters statewide?

- No data about ASL users in NC

Are interpreter education programs accessible to working adults, rural students, and diverse communities?

- Access limited for rural students

What are the current issues or barriers to recruiting more trained interpreters?

- Hard to recruit because most work is contract work and no guarantee of steady work

How many Interpreter Referral Agencies are there in North Carolina? What is DSDHH's current relationship with them?

- There are many national interpreter agencies, but they may not look at skill level, just looking for bodies to fill assignments or push to use VRI. If using agencies, may not have same interpreter for regular meetings for consistency

Where are the gaps in interpreter availability in North Carolina? What is being done about them?

- No data on this

What is the current enrollment vs. completion rate across interpreter programs statewide?

- No data on this

Educational Needs of Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Students

Carol Ann Judgens, NCDPI Senior Director of the Office of Exceptional Children

- Thanked committee for the invitation to attend meeting and discuss the needs of students who have different hearing needs
- DPI is tasked federally to provide individualized education programs for students with disabilities
- To uphold the law, also provide technical assistance and professional learning to ensure meaningful outcomes are achieved for students with disabilities

OEC Highlights: Engagement on Behalf of Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing 2010-Present

State Board of Education & NCDPI Mission

- Guard and maintain the right to a public education for every student in North Carolina and to support public school units in providing every student with an excellent education that prepares them for success in their next phase of life

Office of Exceptional Children Mission

- Ensure that students with disabilities develop intellectually, physically, emotionally, and vocationally through the provision of an appropriate individualized education program in the least restrictive environment

General Supervision for Exceptional Children

- Ensure compliance, accountability, and continuous improvement in special education ○ Support practices that improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Use data-driven monitoring to identify and correct noncompliance.
- Provide targeted technical assistance and professional development to strengthen implementation.
- Monitor fiscal resources to ensure effective use of funds.

Support practices that improve educational outcomes

- Parent Counseling and Training as a related service
- Direct instructional coaching of teachers and related service providers
- High Leverage Practices: Collaboration, Data-driven Planning, Instruction in Behavior and Academics, Intensify and Intervene as Needed

Technical Assistance and Professional Development

- **Areas of Technical Assistance**
 - Instructional support
 - Programming
 - Policy and procedures
 - Assistive technology
 - Transition
 - Fiscal resources
- **Professional Development Topics** ○ **Language, Vocabulary, & Communication**
 - Listening & Hearing Assistive Technology
 - Appropriate Assessment

- Interpreting as a Related Service
- Communication Plan Worksheet
- Long Range Planning
- Parent Counseling and Training
- DeafBlind: DB 101, Haptics, Concept Development, DB Interveners, Parents as Collaborative Leaders, AAC
- Spoken Language Facilitation
- Visual Phonics
- Educational Interpreters: Use of Space, Classifiers, Appropriate Use of Fingerspelling, Decalage
- AAC for Students with Complex Support Needs including Deaf Blindness
- ASL vs MCE
- STEM (presented by AIDB)
- Math for DHH Students

OEC Hosted Stakeholder Groups

- Communication Plan Worksheet
- Spoken Language Facilitators
- Educational Interpreter Licensure
- Educational Interpreter performance evaluation
- DeafBlind Intervener Classifications
- DeafBlind Advisory Group
- HB 317

Community Conversations

Tony Davis, NCDHHS Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Director

- There have been 25 community conversations over the last two months
- Conversations involved anywhere from 5 to 19 community members
 - **Gaps Identified- Top Ten**
 - Interpreter Access
 - Health Care Communication
 - Inefficient Interpreter Scheduling
 - Overreliance on VRI
 - Interpreter Shortage
 - Education System
 - Employment Barriers
 - Transportation Barriers
 - Community Awareness
 - Emergency and Public Safety Barriers
- **DSDHH Updates**
 - DeafBlind Services Manager posted- this position will be setting up our SSP program- Please share posting information
 - Three DeafBlind Services Specialist Positions posted- these 3 positions will cover Asheville and Morganton, Wilmington and Charlotte
 - Family Mentor Program Analyst position- new hired Frank Griffin. Expectation is to have this program up and running within 6 months.

Council Vice Chair Report

Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

- North Carolina Association of the Deaf held its annual conference on February 22, 2026
- Council Chair and Vice Chair presented “Introducing NC Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing”
- Several Council members attended conference
- Received great response to presentation

Council Chair Report

Michael Evola, Council Chair

- Council Chair and Vice Chair continue to meet with DSDHH Director Davis meet monthly
- Creation of two new committees, and having quarterly meetings across the state, for the time being will need to be put on hold until we have fully ensured accessibility for members and complete research on compatible meeting spaces
- Virtual committee meetings will be starting next month. Committee chairs to reach out to members and decide on a consistent date and time frame. Committees will meet outside of the quarterly Council meetings.

Old and New Business

Michael Evola, Council Chair

- At last meeting there was a motion to pursue the amendment of statute 143-B-216.31 to increase the Council membership to include a representative from the North Carolina School for the Deaf and the Eastern Carolina School for the Deaf. Motion was tabled due to legislature process and until Senator Adcock and Representative Turner time to review.
- Question for members should the motion move forward on continue to table it?

Motions

- Senator Adcock moved to table motion till next meeting August 7, 2026, (Robert Nutt) **Motion carried**
- Greta Knigga-Daughtery moved to have the Council consider hosting a meeting at the Schools for the Deaf annually, (Senator Adcock) **Motion carried**
 - Frank Griffin moved to amended motion that Council host meetings at alternative School for the Deaf, pending recommendations from the communication access team at DSDHH, (David Rosental) **Motion carried**
- David Rosenthal moved to have the Council write a letter in support of the CVTA bill that is currently in Congress. Letter to be written to NC delegations of legislators from House and Senate, (Hope Turpin Turner) **Motion carried**
- Michael Evola moved to have Council write a recommendation to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to take whatever actions necessary to move that American Sign

Language to be recognized as the natural language of the Deaf Community in North Carolina (note at this time the floor was turned over the Vice Chair Hope Turner Turpin) (Senator Adcock)

- Senator Adcock noted that this motion will require legislative action. A bill will need to be filed by one or more legislatives.
- Michael Evola moves to withdraw motion, (Frank Griffin) **Motion carries**
- Robert Nutt moves to have the Council draft a letter recommending the Superintendent of DPI to seek amend state law 219-113 to get legislature oversight of the law, (Frank Griffin) **Motion carries**
- Michael Evola moves to have a motion that the Council Chair write a letter to the co-chairs of the new commission on accessibility introducing the Council to them, letting them know who we are, what we do and start a dialogue and see what opportunities there are for collaboration and partnership, (Steve Latus) **Motion carries**

Public Comments

- **Travis Dixon from Winston Salem**-Spoke on Deaf Education in schools as a whole change for the better
- **Lillian from Guilford County** – Junior at UNC Greensboro, soon to be a teach of the Deaf. Spoke on least restrictive environment for Deaf children
- **Janaia Williams from Guilford County**- Spoke as a parent of a Deaf child who is preparing for the transition of preschool in Guilford County

Announcements for the Good of the Council

Council Members

- No announcements currently

Closing Remarks

Michael Evola, Council chair

- Motion to adjourn meeting, (Robert Nutt) **Motion carried**

Adjournment at 3:12 pm

2026 Meetings: August 7, and November 6

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dsdhh/councils-commissions>