North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Quarterly Meeting
August 7, 2026, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
Central Pines Regional Center
4307 Emperor Blvd, Suite 110
Durham, NC 27703

Members Present:
Dr. Christina Armfield
Dara Baril
Stephanie Bland
Antwan Campbell
Dr. Greta Knigga-Daugherty
Michael Evola, Council Chair
Frank Griffin
Mike Lupo
Robert C Nutt, MD, MPH
Randall Pope
Laura Robison
Laurie Rook
David Rosenthal
Representative Brian Turner
Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair
Donald Tinsley, Sr
Caylee Weaver

Ex Officio:
Tony Davis (Present)

Members Absent:
Senator Gale Adcock
Keila E. Armas
Rey Castillo Jr.
Stephen Latus
Senator Chris Measmer
Representative Paul Scott
Dr. Jessica West
Dr. Jennifer Woodard AuD

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 9:05 am by Chair Michael Evola

Welcome and Ethics Reminder:

Chair Michael Evola called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees.

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
Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Vice Chair, Hope Turpin Turner reviewed communication access procedures, interpreter switch signals, timekeeping cards, and introduced TIN (The Interpreter Network) as the new contractor.

Approval of May 1, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Michael Evola, Council Chair

> **Motion #1**: A motion to approve the previous meeting minutes was made by Donald Tinsley and seconded by Laura Robison. **Motion Passed**

Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH) Capacity Building
Tony Davis, Director of the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- Assistant Director of Operations
- Staff Development Manager
- Employment Operations Support Specialist
- Event Coordinator (new permanent position)
- DeafBlind Services Manager
- Tony explained the purpose of each role and shared updates on hiring and expansion of DeafBlind service specialists across regions.

Joint Force Task Force Discussion with Department of Instruction Leadership
Carol Ann Hudgens, Senior Director Department of Public Instruction

DPI's vision for collaboration on a joint task force to assess unmet needs of students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind.

Council members engaged in open discussion on:

- Task force goals and structure
- Data availability and reporting challenges
- Coordination between DPI, DSDHH, school districts, and families

- Funding responsibilities
- Ensuring meaningful implementation of recommendations
- Need for actionable objectives and measurable outcomes

Council members emphasized the importance of balanced representation from DPI, DHHS/DSDHH, community members, educators, interpreters, parents, and students.

Communication Access Work Session Report –
Laura Robison-Committee Chair

Recent Committee Work

- Discussion of legislative priorities including ASL recognition and interpreter access for government activities.
- Exploration of grant funding for rural entities to support accommodations.
- Consideration of funding models for non-ADA events (funerals, weddings).
- Collaboration with MH/DD/SAS listening sessions to identify mental health gaps statewide.
- Proposal for a Deaf Adult Bill of Rights addressing communication access, mental health, independent living, housing, emergency services, and health care.
- Ideas for trainings/webinars explaining mental health terminology.
- Work on a crisis services toolkit.
- Announcement that Shaw University will begin an Interpreter Training Program in Fall 2027.

Education Committee Work Session Report
Dr. Jennifer Woodard- Committee Chair

Jennifer reported that the committee made substantial progress defining the membership structure for the new Educational Task Force. The committee identified:

- Council members who will serve in both council and specialty roles.
- Representatives needed from DPI, DHHS, community stakeholders, and others.
- Professionals whose expertise reflects critical service areas for deaf and hard-of-hearing students statewide.

A working membership list has been drafted, and the next step is outreach to individuals who have been identified or volunteered. The task force aims to meet during the September subcommittee meeting.

Frank Griffin created a task force charter document outlining objectives, membership, data collection methodology, timeline, and responsibilities. Chairs for the task force will be Frank Griffin and Christina Armfield.

The committee also emphasized the importance of including student representatives, ideally a mix of high school students and recent graduates across communication modalities (ASL and spoken language), to ensure diverse perspectives.

North Carolina Schools for the Deaf Special Updates
Kristin Todd, Superintendent (North Carolina School for the Deaf
Cheryl Iannucci, Superintendent (Eastern NC School for the Deaf)

Kristen provided an update on the current developments within both Schools for the Deaf in North Carolina. She noted significant legislative support and ongoing changes intended to strengthen deaf education statewide. The terminology is shifting from “residential schools” to “specialty schools” to better reflect their expanded roles and areas of specialization.

Mission and Educational Philosophy

Kristen emphasized that language access is foundational for a successful and thriving life. NCSD’s mission focuses on bilingual education in ASL and English to support students’ critical thinking, identity development, and future advocacy. The schools aim to empower students to become informed contributors in an inclusive, accessible world.

Expanded Scope of Services

Both schools will be increasing their responsibilities statewide. This expansion is intended to support students from birth through adulthood. The schools aim to improve coordination of services, identify gaps, and ensure continuity for families.

Legislative Updates

Recent legislation in the budget and appropriations act transferred responsibility for early learning and sensory support services to the Schools for the Deaf, effective December 1.
The General Assembly previously established two separate Boards of Trustees (2023) for each school. This new legislation expands the governance structure further.

Continuity of Services

Kristen and Cheryl stressed that their top priority is to ensure uninterrupted services for families. They will assess operational needs, funding requirements, and agency coordination necessary to support Part C services. An official planning meeting with Dr. Hudgens is scheduled for next Thursday.

Deaf Mentor Program (NCSD)

NCSD launched a Deaf Mentor Program in March, including a Family Emergent Camp held in June. Families reported positive experiences, especially regarding interactions with deaf adults. This program will become a key component of early intervention services.

ENCSD Updates

Cheryl reported that ENCSD is preparing to open a new preschool program to address service gaps in the Wilson area. Parents have shown strong interest, and materials will be distributed soon.
ENCSD also received a $200,000 grant to restart its summer school program next year after budget constraints prevented its operation this year.

Commitment to Collaboration and Student Access
Both leaders reiterated the importance of partnerships, information sharing, and maintaining strong relationships with the council. Their core belief is that every deaf and hard-of-hearing child in North Carolina deserves full language access and quality education.
Campus Visit Invitation
The schools extended an invitation for council members to visit their campuses. They noted the benefits students experience from peer communication and participation in school activities such as sports and prom. Visitors are encouraged to call ahead to arrange guided tours.

Vice Chair Report
Hope Turpin Turner, Council Vice Chair

Hope shared information on the Deaf Flag, created by DeafBlind artist Arnauld Blard of France and adopted by the World Federation of the Deaf in 2013. She recommended incorporating the Deaf Flag into future council outreach, public events, and photo opportunities alongside the U.S. and North Carolina flags. Hope highlighted the value of increased cultural visibility and public education efforts.

Council Chair Report
Michael Evola, Council Chair

Michael provided updates on council appointments and reappointments awaiting action by the Governor and DHHS Secretary. These include:

Awaiting Governor Appointment

- Hard of Hearing Consumer
- Licensed Audiologist
- NC Association for the Deaf Representative

Awaiting Governor Reappointments

- Deaf Consumer (Hope Turpin Turner)
- Parent of a Deaf Child (Jessica West; Keila Armas mentioned earlier)
- Pediatric Society Representative (Dr. Robert Nutt)

Awaiting DHHS Secretary Appointment or Reappointment

- Division of Social Services Representative
- Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (Laura Robison)

Michael noted that short legislative session activity has ended. Council members are encouraged to submit future agenda requests.

Old Business

- Frank Griffin requested that HB 854 be prioritized for next year's long session following its expiration on the committee.
- Representative Turner (Brian) recommended developing a legislative policy priorities document ahead of the long 2027 session. This motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The priorities document will provide broad policy goals to guide potential legislation, like those used by major statewide organizations.
- Dr. Nutt recommended conducting another council-wide priority survey (like past efforts under David Rosenthal's leadership) to provide this document.

New Business

Motion #1: Dr. Nutt moved to update organizational charts (DPI, DHHS, DSDHH) created in 2017–2018 to clarify agency structure and council advisory pathways. **Motion passed**. Director Davis will locate prior versions and update them.

Motion #2: Dr. Nutt moved to request updated documents from relevant agencies outlining services, programs, and resources provided to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals. **Motion passed**

Public Comments

The council received extensive and impactful public input:

- **Emily White (Charlotte):** Raised concerns about lack of local deaf education resources, challenges advocating in mainstream environments, and absence of Deaf Space standards in building codes. Requested guidance on effective community advocacy.
- **Pam White (Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools):** Shared concerns about district-level interpreter hiring practices that bypass qualified local interpreters, rely heavily on VRI, and ignore DPI testing requirements (EIPA 3.5). Described resulting student trauma, language deprivation, and lack of peer access.
- **Steven Farmer (Charlotte):** Discussed trauma among deaf children, personal and family experiences with language deprivation, and upcoming trauma-informed care trainings available statewide.
- **Dr. Jordan Wright:** Spoke about educational interpreter standards, trauma caused by lack of language access, lived experiences with oral-only education, and systemic failures in providing peer access. Encouraged statewide language standards and highlighted work with the Governor's Commission for Accessibility.
- **Craig Blevins**: Shared urgent concerns about being denied interpreters as a Deaf teacher. Reported severe emotional distress and significant access barriers. Requested council support.

Council members expressed gratitude for the speakers' courage and reinforced the importance of addressing systemic inequities.

Tony Davis noted that DSDHH community conversations statewide continue to reveal similar patterns. A statewide report will be developed and shared publicly.

Closing Remarks
Michael Evola, Council Chair

- Motion to adjourn meeting (Greta Knigga-Daugherty) Motion carried

Adjournment 2:53 pm