



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

**ERIC RAFF
DIRECTOR**

Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
**1602 ROLLING HILLS DRIVE, SUITE 203
HENRICO, VIRGINIA 23229-5012**

(804) 662-9502 (V)
(800) 552-7917 (V)
(804) 325-1290 (VP)
(804) 662-9718 (FAX)
www.VDDHH.org

**Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24)
4th Quarter Report
April 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024**

Executive Management

VDDHH Advisory Board – VDDHH hosted its' advisory board meeting on Wednesday May 1. The Board received agency reports, two public comments and several guest speakers. The Board received an Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program (EHDI) presentation by Daphne Miller and Deepali Sanghani with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and a Text to 9-1-1 and Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG911) presentation by Dorothy Spears-Dean with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). Eric recognized and awarded a certificate of appreciation to Susanne Wilbur (professional) and Timothy Patterson (parent) for serving two (2) 4-year term that expired June 30. The two seats are for a parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child and a professional serving deaf and hard of hearing people.

Legislation – Tues May 14, The General Assembly adopted, and the Governor has signed HB6001, the 2025-2026 Biennial budget. VDDHH obtained a small General Fund (GF) increase to cover the increase cost of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). VDDHH also had a small \$300k Special Fund (SF) decrease due to declining relay usage. All other funding is stable.

Human Resources – May and June, we completed two rounds of interviews to fill Community Services Specialist position. VDDHH is also recruiting for the wage position, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialist to serve the Central Virginia region (Richmond). Melissa Forkner, Deaf Mentor Coordinator announced intent to resign due to relocation to California. Her last day is July 22.

Facility – VDDHH is working with Department of General Services and a brokerage to explore a lease renewal with minor renovations/upgrades to the facility or competitively procure a new lease at a new facility elsewhere.

Health and Human Resources (HHR) Language and Disability Access Project - VDDHH continued to participate with a focus on sign language interpretation and access to effective

communication considerations. Met with the Action Plan team and submitted edits and suggestions toward the final draft of the Action Plan.

Virginia Relay

Town Hall Meetings – The virtual Virginia Relay town hall meeting on June 13 focus on educating the community about VA relay programs and services. There were two sessions, morning and early evening, with approximately 20 participants. This is one of several series of town hall meetings.

Virginia Relay Partners – We are focusing on providing free training on how to recognize and handle relay calls targeting 911 professionals through the Virginia Relay Partners.

Technology Assistance Program (TAP)

Centralizing TAP applications – Been piloting the process of centralizing the TAP applications as it relates to screening and data entries with Regions 3 and 6. All TAP applications for these two regions were screened by VDDHH, and once approved, consumer information is forwarded to the appropriate Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional specialist for assessment and/or delivery/installation. Beginning July 1, 2024, TAP Applications for the Commonwealth of Virginia will be sent to the Central Office for review, approval, and data entries. Wrapped the pilot project by creating instructional videos in American Sign Language to assist contractors with the expectations of this process.

Also created an online TAP application to be available on the VDDHH website and plan to have this system go live on July 1. This will allow anyone who is viewing our website about “TAP” or Equipment apply for TAP in live time. Electronic applications will be sent to Brittany Howard and Felecia Smith as the TAP Admin team for review and approval.

TAP Process improvements - To keep track of contracted requirements, all D/HH Regional Specialists must enter their event requests and post event summaries into the TAP database. Brittany Howard, TAP Manager and Felecia Smith, Virginia Relay Manager worked with Information Technology staff on developing the TAP Activity Report into the TAP Database. This will eliminate reports for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialists. Once this has been built and Specialists transition to inputting their activities directly into the database instead of using the excel report, the contractors will only need to submit invoices at the end of the month because we will be able to run reports via Power Bi.

With this change, the contractors will only need to submit a monthly invoice as all reporting data will be pulled directly from the TAP database. This will increase accuracy of data found in the database as well as improve process effectiveness and efficiency. With so many changes being made to TAP processes, we are working on updating the TAP D/HH Regional Specialist training manual to reflect the updated procedures.

Quarterly Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialist Meeting – On Tuesday April 16, Brittany Howard, TAP Manager hosted the quarterly meeting for D/HH Regional Specialists. During this

meeting Brittany provided the Specialists with an update on the Affordable Connectivity Program continuous wind down and provided them with resources that may benefit their consumers to supplement. Also provided them with a status update on the iPads and the plans for training.

Interpreter Services Program (ISP)

Promoting Equity in Healthcare Interpreting (PEHI) project - We continue to participate in the Promoting Equity in Healthcare Interpreting project, a five-year Rehabilitation Services Administration grant-funded training that increasing the number and skills of ASL/English interpreters. This will allow Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and DeafBlind patients to experience equitable healthcare.

Webpages - drafting updates/changes to the “Interpreters” tab on the VDDHH website to make information clearer, more relevant, and reader-friendly, in the process of developing a mockup of the new dropdowns with revised information.

Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS)

Policy changes regarding registration – prohibiting out-of-state interpreters from taking the VQAS unless they live or work in Virginia. We have drafted/updated policies (grievance, accommodation, etc.) and preparing related standard operating procedures; including out of state candidate registration phase-out plan effective in May to start phase out as of July 1, 2024. This will decrease the total number of assessments administered yearly by the VQAS program however will mitigate the misleading use of ‘credentials’ as “qualified.”

Performance and Written Assessment Platform - Exploration of options for VQAS Performance and Written Assessment platform for scoring and materials in a secure file management environment and tracking changes to testing materials. We investigated a Canvas online learning platform and checked into its functionality. Working with DARS IT, a Canvas representative and VITA, we used the cooperative contract (JMU) with permission from VITA to move forward with the process and eventually executed a contract. After purchasing, the next steps will be implementation and Canvas offer a 6-week onboarding training package or admin users.

Community Services

Virginia Early Hearing Detection Intervention (EHDI) - conference brought out parents, educators, and professionals to learn the latest on hearing loss and receive information regarding newborn hearing screening, follow up testing and early intervention services. Paul Stuessy and Brittany Howard worked the exhibitor booth and Melissa Forkner, Deaf Mentor Coordinator, gave a presentation providing updates on the program.

Opening Doors and Unlocking Potential (ODUP) - Brittany Howard and Paul Stuessy attended ODUP, a conference benefitting Teachers of the Deaf, some parents, and other professionals. Provided the latest resources and Telecommunications Assistance Program (TAP)

Deaf Mentor (DM) Project

Deaf Mentors from the second training cohort are now beginning to have families placed.

Support Service Provider (SSP) Project – The SSP workgroup comprising of VDDHH, Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) and Reynolds Community College (RCC) have met approximately 6 times to finalize the SSP Operations handbook and prepare for the DB/SSP onsite training being held at Reynolds Community College on July 19-20, develop the Deafblind Orientation training curriculum, draft the agenda and in-depth planning for the event logistics. Successfully recruited and screened people to become SSP participants and Deafblind participants to participate in the Deafblind and SSP training in July. 22 SSP participants are enrolled in Reynolds Community College (RCC) online curriculum by June and 11 Deafblind participants were accepted for the July training session.