



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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**Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25)
1st Quarter Report
July 1, 2024 – September 30, 2024**

Executive Management

VDDHH Advisory Board – VDDHH hosted its' advisory board meeting on Wednesday August 28. The Board members received agency reports and gave reports. 6 members attended with one excused absence and two vacant seats. VDDHH is recruiting to fill the two seats for a parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child and a professional serving deaf and hard of hearing people. The Board and staff also reviewed and revised the Department vision & mission statements as well as identified strategies that the Department will focus on from July 2024 – June 2026. The next advisory board meeting will be on Wednesday November 6.

Strategic Plan – The VDDHH's 2024-26 Strategic Plan is published and available online. The agency goals, objectives and strategies are aligned with service areas/products and services (programs). The status of the Department is reflected in the 2-year plan for 2024-2026. Strategies are listed under the Goals/Objectives. Strategies are what we will work on between now and June 30, 2026, and perhaps beyond. [Strategic Plan \(virginia.gov\)](https://www.virginia.gov) The Objectives are in aligned with the Objective Key Results (OKRs) also known as performance measures. We have 7 new agency performance measures. [Strategic Plan Measure Details \(virginia.gov\)](https://www.virginia.gov) To view our measures, you'll have to use the "Show Filter" feature to narrow it down to VDDHH:

Secretarial Areas – click on Health and Human Resources

Agencies – scroll down to 751

Human Resources – After two rounds of interviews, Karen Rhoads was selected to fill the Community Services Specialist position. She was previously serving as a part-time Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialist in Fredericksburg. Hiring Karen created a wage (part-time) position vacancy. VDDHH is recruiting applicants to fill two wage positions, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialist to serve the Central Virginia region (Richmond) and the Fredericksburg region. VDDHH is also recruiting applicants to fill the Deaf Mentor Coordinator position and a fiscal technician.

Facility – VDDHH was exploring lease options with DARS however there were concerns with the locations not being on a bus line. VDDHH is unique that we receive visitors and clients to the central office using a bus line. As a result, a decision was made to stay at its existing location. VDDHH has been working with Department of General Services to execute a new 10-year lease with minor renovations/upgrades to the central office. Renovations will include expanding one of TAP storage space and extending a hallway to an exit into the main hallway. The TAP manager office will be relocated next to Virginia Relay manager’s office which will consolidate the telecommunication unit into the same proximity of office spaces.

Health and Human Resources (HHR) Language and Disability Access Project – The project is about improving language and disability access to HHR agencies. VDDHH continued to participate with a focus on sign language interpretation and access to effective communication. Met with the HHR Action Plan team and submitted edits and suggestions toward the final draft of the Action Plan. The Action Plan study results was discussed with the VDDHH program managers to begin developing an agency plan to meet the goals. The Language Access Coordinator was designated to Karen Brimm, Interpreter Services, and the Disability Access Coordinator was designated to Paul Stuessy, Community Services.

Virginia Relay

Virginia Relay Partner - Three Virginia Relay Partner training sessions for the City of Virginia Beach, City Manager’s Office, have been completed as a part of a Department of Justice settlement. They were conducted on September 16th, 17th and 18th. These sessions were requested and organized by R.J. Mattes, Assistant to the City Manager for Special Projects and ADA Coordinator. All three trainings were conducted virtually and had strong attendance (details below).

Date	Number of Attendees
9/16/24	386
9/17/24	264
9/18/24	299

Technology Assistance Program (TAP)

Centralizing TAP applications – Beginning July 1, 2024, all TAP Applications for the Commonwealth of Virginia are sent to the Central Office for review, approval, and data entries. Instructional video in ASL has been sent out to all Specialists along with written instructions. Technology Assistance Program has begun taking over the approval process and entering consumer information into the database. Specialists have also been switched to a “Read Only” access to the TAP database which will prevent any accidental consumer profile updates. This will ensure the accuracy of data recorded in the database. VDDHH is in the process of updating the TAP training manual for all Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Specialists to get an updated version/copy to reference as needed.

Online TAP application is now accessible on our website under the Equipment tab. The functions of the application and notifications have been tested. Consumers may now submit their TAP application online but will still be required to submit their proof of Virginia residency and family size gross income to determine eligibility.

TAP Process Improvements - The TAP Activity Report is now live the TAP Database. Specialists have officially transitioned to putting their activities into the database instead of using the excel reports as of July 1, 2024. The contractors now only need to submit invoices at the end of the month because we can run reports via Power Bi.

*** Virginia Relay and Technology Assistance Program (TAP) ***

TEDPA & NASRA Conferences – Felecia Smith, Virginia Relay, Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program (TAP) and Eric Raff, Director, attended the Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) and National Association of State Relay Administration (NASRA) conferences in Louisville, KY last 9/2/24 – 9/11/24. A hot topic was the emergence of artificial intelligence in relay and telecommunication technology.

Virginia Relay Digital Modernization – Felecia Smith, Virginia Relay and Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program, have been meeting with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Guide House to apply for Federal Non-Deployment Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding. Discussions regarding how potential allocated funds would be used for Virginia Relay and TAP if the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) were to receive funds from DHCD’s BEAD to prepare and support the analog to digital transition for Relay users and TAP consumers. VDDHH has been collaborating with Hamilton Relay, myMMX, and nWise.

Felecia and Brittany have been drafting a proposal that combines initiatives including the TTY (text teletype) to RTT (real-time text) transition, DeafBlind Access to 711, and adding TAP digital equipment under one project called: **Virginia Relay Digital Modernization**. The project description is as follows:

Virginia Relay facilitates communication between individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or speech disabled and standard telephone users. Because state relay programs oversee analog-based relay services, it is essential to develop and implement additional digital infrastructure to ensure that all relay users in the Commonwealth can maintain access to telecommunications services.

The objective of the Virginia Relay Digital Modernization project is to support the transition of relay users from an analog telecommunications infrastructure to a digital infrastructure. If awarded, grant funds will be used to:

1. **RTT to 711** - Support the transition from TTY to RTT in the Commonwealth by collaborating with our current relay provider, Hamilton Relay, and nWise, the company that developed RTT to 711 technology, which will serve as the bridge to resolve the digital divide for TTY users.

2. **DeafBlind access to 711** - *The goal of this project is to provide DeafBlind individuals with access to 711 relay services utilizing software that has been specifically designed to support independent telecommunication access for DeafBlind individuals in the Commonwealth.*
3. **TAP equipment options** – *Funding will allow VDDHH to purchase and add an array of digital telecommunication equipment as options for consumers based on their individualized telecommunication needs.*

Funding may also include 1) training for the D/HH Regional Specialists and consumers 2) advertising 3) administrative support. Administrative support will include drafting biannual reports, responding to complaints, fraud, waste, and abuse, and maintaining records for ten (10) years. VDDHH is having conversations with Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) for approval before applying for the grant.

Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program (TAP) hosted a brief 40-minute zoom meeting to brainstorm the types of equipment the Specialists and their consumers may like to see in TAP to help support with the analog to digital transition. Specialists shared that their consumers are seeking certain equipment and apps for their telecommunication needs.

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 increases the number and skills of ASL/English interpreters. This will allow Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and DeafBlind patients to experience equitable healthcare. VDDHH continues to complete activities as appropriate. Four mentees completed activities during this cycle, there will be no mentees from Virginia during the next cycle. Instead, we will be planning oncoming year activities such as filming community members' stories for training material.

Webpages The updates/changes to the "Interpreters" tab on the VDDHH website to make information clearer, more relevant, and reader-friendly also has new dropdowns with revised information. The webpages were released and is now available on the VDDHH website.

Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS)

Performance and Written Assessment Platform – We explored 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, VDDHH is awaiting approval to move forward with a contract to purchase Canvas. After purchasing, the next steps will be implementation and Canvas offer a 6-week onboarding training package or admin users.

Department of Education grant - Drafted and submitted an annual grant renewal application to the Virginia Department of Education for continued support of the operating budget for the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening. The grant application was submitted on August 5, 2024, and it was accepted. Funds will be utilized during Federal Fiscal Year 2025 (FFY25) or October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025.

Community Services

NAD Conference – Paul Stuessy and Eric Raff attended the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Biennial Conference in Chicago, IL participated in several workshops on various topics. Prior to the NAD conference, Director Raff attended the 2-day National Association of State Agencies on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH) event including the policy summit and business meeting. He was elected as Treasurer for a 2-year term. Note: Director Raff was also the founder of NASADHH.

Deaf Mentor (DM) Project

The Deaf Mentor Coordinator resigned due to relocation to California. Paul Stuessy, Community Services Manager, is now overseeing the program for the interim. Deaf Mentors from the second training cohort have signed contracts and Mr. Stuessy has been scheduling “meet and greet” introductory sessions between families and Deaf Mentors. This will allow families to be placed or assigned to a Deaf Mentor so services can begin.

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 finalized the SSP Operations handbook and a training curriculum for the deafblind participants. The 2nd cohort of Deafblind and SSP participants onsite training session was held at Reynolds Community College on July 19-20. 24 SSP participants are enrolled in Reynolds Community College (RCC) online curriculum and 11 Deafblind participants were accepted for the July training session. 22 SSP participants and 9 Deafblind participants attended the onsite training session. 18 trained SSPs from the 2nd cohort are in the process of processing their W9s and registering in eVA. DARS procurement executed 18 contracts so they can start providing services as of October 1.

Having completed training of both cohorts, we now have total of 36 trained SSPs and 17 DeafBlind participants who received orientation. A quarterly grant report was submitted to the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities. We submitted a Grant Modification application for a ‘No-Cost’ extension of the original Project funding so that it can be used beyond the original December 2024 ending date. The new requested ending date for the Project grant will be June 30, 2025, to allow VDDHH to spend down remaining funds according to a modified budget and activity plan. The extension application was submitted on August 5, 2024, and approved by the Board. VDDHH is seeking funding for service continuity beyond June 30, 2025.