

Department of Rehabilitation Services
67 Prospect Avenue, 3rd Floor
Hartford, CT 06106-2980

Advisory Board Meeting: February 10, 2014
Minutes

Members in Attendance:

Luisa Soboleski, Board Chairperson
Raymond DeRosa, Parent of student enrolled in public school
Colleen Hayles, Designee, Department of Education
Mary Silvestri, Deaf Member
Matt Ranelli, Parent of student in oral education program
Bernice Zampano, Designee, Department of Labor
Jane Whitehead, Designee, Department of Developmental Services
Melissa Thompson, Department of Social Services

Members Not Present:

Edward Peltier, Executive Director, American School for the Deaf, Ex-Officio Member
William Rivera, Designee, Department of Children & Families
Sandra McGee, President of CCOSD, Ex-Officio Member
Jeffery Bravin, Deaf member
Mary Lynch, Hard of Hearing Member, Office of State Comptroller
Amy Mirizzi, Department of Public Health

Vacant Positions:

Designee from DMHAS
Consultant for Hearing Impaired Programs, Ex-Officio
Otolaryngologist licensed to practice in the State of Connecticut
Deaf / Hard of Hearing Member
Parent of student enrolled at ASD
Deaf Member
Parent of a deaf child

BRS/CDHI Staff Present:

Amy Porter, Commissioner
Sara Gerhold, Interpreter Coordinator
Melissa Dennis, Counselor
Maryann Dayton-Fitzgerald, Counselor

Guests Present:

Harvey Corson, Mike Fiorno, Patti Wilson, Sue Pedersen, Keith Vinci

Interpreters: Cyndi Ward and Pam Crawford

CART Reporter: Diana Huntington

Call to Order, Acceptance of Agenda, Minutes and Adjournment Time:

Luisa Soboleski called meeting to order at 1:38. Acceptance of the agenda. There was no quorum at either the September or November meetings; therefore, no need to approve the minutes. June 2013 minutes were discussed and accepted.

DORS Report

Amy Porter presented a department update. For personnel, the Governor has recently appointed Jonathan Slifka as the Governor's liaison to the disability community. Mr. Slifka will be tied to DORS for administrative purposes, but he is in a cabinet level position and his office is at the Capitol building. DORS has also hired Kathleen Kabara as Director of Planning and Operational Readiness. She will be coordinating our statewide planning efforts, including emergency preparedness efforts.

Amy Porter also reviewed the status of the DORS strategic planning initiative. She indicated that there were a number of representatives from the deaf community who attended the public meeting on January 28, 2014. A number of questions raised at the public meeting centered on the decision to separate out the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Unit from the Interpreting Unit in the proposed structure. The rationale for this structure was provided, with the explanation that the supports needed by these two programs within the Department are quite different. The counselors are looking for a close tie with the staff within BRS who provide vocational services to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Interpreting Unit is looking for support with billing, with payroll, and with management of the business functions associated with interpreting services.

The comments from the deaf community suggested a structure where deaf and hard of hearing services become a fifth bureau under the Department. This suggestion has been made on several occasions, but given the size, scope and budget of the current services, this option is not currently under consideration. There are only 7 full time equivalent positions within what was the Commission on Deaf and Hearing Impaired, and the size and scope of these programs does not warrant a separate bureau. There is a desire by the deaf community representatives to have a structure similar to that of Blind Services, but there are two factors at play here. First, the size and scope of the programs is much larger. There are over 100 full time equivalent positions in Blind Services, and four major program units. Second, blindness is the only disability group that has a separate structure contemplated in federal statute. For the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, one of the largest programs within the Department, states have two options. The first is to have a VR program that serves all individuals with disabilities, and the second, and Connecticut's current structure, is to have one VR program that serves individuals with legal blindness, and one that serves individuals with all other disabilities. A separate program for deafness is not an option within the federal statutes governing this program.

There was a concern raised about how the deaf and hard of hearing communities would find our services, and where they might learn about resources. There were also concerns about services to individuals who are hard of hearing, and that the prevalence for this group is much higher than the prevalence of deafness. This may be an issue that the Board needs to consider in terms of focus.

Attendees were encouraged to share their feedback by email if they felt that their specific feedback was not covered at the public meeting. Attendees were also encouraged to identify particular priority areas that we could work on together.

Counseling Unit Report: The counselors presented data on services provided, town and county data, types of inquiry and consumer's mode of communication (report attached). They also talked a lot about access within various agencies and organizations, and their efforts to educate and increase access. They are represented on the CT Interagency Birth to Three Coordination Council, the CT DCF Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council, the CT DMHAS Deaf Council and they are working with OPA, DSS and the CT Deaf Interagency Meetings to share information.

Interpreting Unit Report: Sara provided a status update on the Interpreting Unit from July 1, 2013 through present. She indicated that there has been minimal change in staffing, with one interpreter who retired during this time period. There are currently 41 active interpreters on staff. She provided the attached charts covering interpreting service statistics by region, by request method, by assigned hours, by types of customers, by lead time to fill assignment.

New Business

Given time constraints, no new business was introduced.

Announcements

Patty Wilson from Communications Advocacy Network (CAN) announced that they will be offering ASL training, and that the training announcements were available on the table.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m.

Next Meeting

April 7, 2014