

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

Advisory Board Meeting: February 17, 2015
Minutes

Members in Attendance: Luisa Soboleski, Jeff Bravin, Harvey Corson, Amy Mirizzi, Jane Whitehead, Bernice Zampano, Mary Lynch, Matt Ranelli

Members Not Present: Sandra McGee, Carl Moeller, Mary Silvestri, John Lamb, Terri-Lynn Johnston, Colleen Hayles, Bill Rivera

DORS Staff Present: Commissioner Amy Porter, Patti Clay, Khampasong Khantivong, Pat Clark, Sara Gerhold, Melissa Dennis, Maryann Dayton-Fitzgerald, Andrew Norton

Guests Present: Shari Romblad (phone)

Interpreters: Mary Sue Owens and Tammy Boutin

CART Reporter: Sharon Masse

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

Luisa Soboleski called meeting to order at 1:41. There was not a quorum so housekeeping items were looked at – to update lists and phone numbers. Luisa indicated there are still four vacancies, and Dr. Moeller was unable to make this meeting, but plans on attending in the future. Without a quorum the old minutes were not looked at, but the meeting went on to reports until a quorum was available. When quorum was achieved (after Shari's phone call) it was decided not to vote on the minutes as discussion after the educational presentation was lacking. It will be tabled until the April meeting.

Jeff missed the last meeting and asked for a brief overview. Luisa said Janet and Cristi were here and they explained that they use the ASL interpreter bubble, and some were concerned because some students would not understand the ASL interpreter and they did not provide signed English or oral interpretation. And if the student has a hard time reading, they said they could listen which would not work for a student who is deaf. There were a lot of issues related with smarter balance where they felt that we were being neglected and overlooked.

Jeff indicated there was a discussion at their coalition meeting that involves teachers of the deaf from ASD, Soundbridge and various other schools. There was a lot of discussion related to the SBAC, and the schools are filing a petition that the students who need accommodations we file to the State, and we have a huge stack of paperwork to present to the State. They decided to write a new declaration that they would provide any accommodation for any student, meaning physical, means you could have someone there signing it, you could provide an oral interpreter and it would be effective this year for SBAC while they work with the consortium.

Action: Jeff will forward the letter from the State Department of Education. He will also forward in a position paper from the United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Justice released in November on communication accessibility in schools.

Matt asked if the group could act as a sort of clearinghouse for information that is not always widely distributed – maybe even have a website to add it to. Jeff thought it would be for the State Department of Education to do. Luisa said her last CONNCASE meeting was a discussion group due to weather-related absences, and they went over a lot of the same information and they were also unaware.

Jane stated just because there's a communication and language piece doesn't mean that every school district is going to present it properly. So how can we guarantee that now the State of Connecticut is going to do the right thing and communicate the fact that during this testing you can have these special accommodations? How can we make sure that is going to happen for all the kids who need it? Mary said there needs to be a compliance oversight committee and wondered if hearing tests were covered by insurance? Jane indicated it depends on whether it is considered medically necessary.

It was asked if DORS could add these communications as well as part of their service to the deaf and hard of hearing community. Harvey then asked about reviewing the mission of this board and DORS, clarification around roles. Luisa also indicated some of the information on the DORS website was out-of-date.

Action: Commissioner Porter indicated that the agency could look into the possibilities of how to update and include new information on the website.

Jeff reported that the M. O. R. E. (more opportunities for regional effectiveness) commission on special education, a subcommittee of the education committee, is focusing on special ed, but it also includes deaf and hard of hearing students, and they are looking at how to improve the effectiveness for deaf and hard of hearing students statewide.

Jane indicated that the reality is we need kids to be identified when they're younger than preschool. We need education of those pediatricians and primary care physicians to make hearing more common in the discussion.

Amy added that we need to figure out what our priorities are, because we're doing a little bit of everything, and if we don't have some clear priorities, we're not going to be effective at getting any of that done. Luisa indicated that the mission was even put on hold, but with Patti on board that would be a good place to start.

DORS Report

Commissioner Amy Porter introduced Patti Clay, the bureau chief, heading the DORS community living division. Interpreting services, the deaf and hard of hearing counseling program, as well as a lot of other programs fall under the community living division. Patti introduced her assistant, Khampasong Khantivong, and explained she was bound by confidentiality. Amy then introduced Pat Clark, who has replaced Dwight Godwin in interpreting services. Amy also indicated there was a new staff member – Phoung Nguyen – that will be assigned to payroll and bookkeeping in the interpreting unit.

Legislative Update: Andrew Norton gave a legislative update. He sent out an email two weeks prior, but wasn't sure everyone received. He will add the newer members to his list. He indicated Pat and Melissa helped in finding some relevant bills.

One of the bills is a topic that has been talked about in the past regarding hearing aids and requiring health insurance companies to pay for hearing aids. This legislation has taken different forms over the years. Right now the law states you have to pay for children 12 years old and younger, but this bill

removes age restrictions. Another similar bill revolves around a girl who needs an assistant dog, but her family doesn't have the thousands to pay for it. The bill would cover the use of an assistance dog for whatever disability makes for the use of an assistance dog. Under the new Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, there was a change in the law regarding state insurance mandates, and the change said that if the State broadens or changes an insurance mandate, expands in a significant way, that now is going to have to be covered by the State, not the insurance company. In speaking to Andrew's counterpart at the Department of Insurance, his suspicion is these would not be covered by insurance and would have to be covered by the state.

There are a couple of bills that deal with testing in schools - to expand screenings for kids in more grades. Also possibly at a technical high school - i.e. if you're spending hours a day on a band saw, you might injure your hearing, and they want to know if that is happening. There's another bill in the works to restrict the requirement for certain testing - checking for posture related to certain bone disease. Because there's vision, audiometric and postural screenings.

There is also the bill that we asked the human services committee to raise because they deal with our agency regarding interpreter qualifications and to enact into law the modernization of qualifications as proposed by the working group that's been at work with Amy. The bill talks about requirements for legal, medical, educational and community settings for interpreting services. And it updates some of the requirements regarding what type of studies and training you've received, from what sorts of organizations across national and otherwise, like from the national RID. It talks about the Boys Town standards and National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and other organizations that are out there taking part in making sure people are appropriately trained in their field of interpreting. It also has an exemption for unpaid interpreting services, such as in an emergency or volunteer situation. Andrew will inform the group on the public hearing date. We just learned that the human services committee is going to draw up their own bill regarding interpreting services to mandate that all state agencies use DORS for interpreting services. DORS has 42 interpreters employed, there are approximately 200 registered with the state according to Sara, but about half of those could be located elsewhere in the country as Video Relay interpreters. (Harvey asked about the bill number but as it doesn't have one yet, Andrew will share once available.)

Interpreting Unit Report: Sara reiterated there are two new employees in interpreting services, Pat Clark as Interpreter Coordinator and Phoung Nguyen in fiscal. We will be posting an office assistant's position shortly. We've been struggling since October, doing the best we can with the resources that we have. I believe in the end of December we added four new interpreters to our roster. One was a certified deaf interpreter, and two were intermittent interpreters, and then our office assistant transferred out into the field to become an interpreter.

We're still very busy now with the spring semester college classes. We are serving 11 different colleges and universities in the state. We have about 26 individual students, and that's a total of 74 courses. We also provide interpreting for two school districts, and that translates to five days a week, all day, for K to 12 students.

We are providing ongoing interpreting services for our rehab counselors for the deaf, who work within the BRS program. Normally, they have their own interpreter assistants. However, they've had a difficult time hiring into those positions, and currently we have a program where they are getting interpreting services through us.

We have 230 interpreters registered, 116 of whom live in state. We do have the registry online on our website, and it will give the name of the interpreter and their certification. If their name is not there and you see a person is working somewhere out in Connecticut, it needs to be reported to our office, and we will look into it. Amy thanked Sara and Jackie for the amazing job they have done with 50 percent staffing. Bernice and Luisa also thanked Sara for her help and being responsive to their needs.

Counseling Report: A report was shared related to counseling services provided from September 1 through January 31. They are providing a good deal of case management, even though this is not the focus of their services. They are finding that advocacy and consultation is more effective. They still see clients on a weekly basis and/or as needed and/or, emergency kind of calls and also meet with DCF, OPA, hospitals, public schools, mostly to educate. They work with ASD, working with their students as well, working with the teachers and staff, and that's advocacy and consultation and possibly doing parent sessions. Another education piece is talking about the importance of having an appropriate interpreter for the client or consumer. There are many calls into the Counseling Unit, and they're all about different topics, including hearing aid funding, acquiring hearing aids, cochlear implants or assistive devices.

Harvey asked how many hours per counseling session and Maryann stated about an hour. Harvey also asked whether a male individual would feel more comfortable if they had a counseling session with a male rather than a female. Maryann and Melissa indicated that it's not usually an issue. Melissa said she had worked with two men who just had implant surgeries, but that there have been some calls where a male counselor would have been preferred. In those instances, Maryann and Melissa provide the list of available counselors, but the availability is limited and sometimes the insurance is an issue. There are two male counselors in Connecticut who serve this population, but one you have to have substance abuse, so there are some eligibility requirements. Harvey indicated he thought they were doing a good job, but hopefully in a better budgetary period there could be male counselors added.

Interpreter Legislation

Harvey first commented on the fact that it makes sense for sister agencies to be using DORS interpreters. Before it was CDHI, which is now DORS, so it may have been an oversight that dropped that part of the language – it's basically just putting it back in the law.

Harvey said he is on the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf task force on updating the interpreting standards, which is what raised bill 6765 deals with. It is designed to update the standards, which are two to six years behind the national standards.

DORS was asked to prepare a report to the legislature on the subject, and presentations were made by the taskforce throughout the state. Interpreters and members of the deaf community came and asked questions and gave input. The proposal looks at phasing in the new standards over time. It also expands the certifying boards. In the past, we're limiting ourselves to the R. I.D. standards, but we have also decided to include the EIPA standards, the educational interpreting performance assessment, which occurs in Boys Town. We wanted to give interpreters who work in educational settings another option so that we could provide interpreters in the school systems.

Harvey also reported that they had proposed that an interpreting standards and monitoring board be established. He talked about the reasons, such as giving individuals a place to go if they had a complaint. This is not part of the current bill, but the taskforce will continue to advocate for such a board.

Jane asked if interpreters are currently not licensed. Harvey explained that they are not licensed, but they are registered through the DORS interpreting unit, and they do have their cards to certify that they are qualified to provide interpreting services under various settings. Jeff B asked are you aware of any Connecticut state college or university that is considering adding an interpreting program? CCSU has talked about it, as did UConn. Harvey indicated that there is an articulation agreement that exists between Northwest Community College and CCSU, and they will allow the students who complete their interpreting program at northwestern with their associate's degree to then transfer into all of their credits to CCSU and then complete a bachelor's degree. As far as UCONN they have sign language and interpreting courses but not an actual interpreting program. Jeff asked if the information had been communicated to the community, as he wasn't aware of it. Harvey said he can contact the people involved and see if they can do more to spread the word.

Old Business

No old business

New Business

No new business

Announcements

From Matt - There is another bill - 5525, which is testing for cytomegalovirus, a cause of deafness, also associated with learning disabilities. It's mostly an educational bill, but the group may wish to follow.

From Jeff - March 20 and 21 ASD has their annual family learning weekend, and any parent, children with hearing loss, are very welcome to come to our family learning weekend. We have a lot of different presenters and workshops. Beth Benedict, who presented for our educational conference last month, will be our keynote speaker again.

Jeff also asked Andrew if Access Health was a State of Connecticut Entity – their programs are not captioned. Amy said she would try to find out where to contact – a private entity runs it.

Guest Speakers

At 2:30 Shari Romblad, a parent of a child with hearing loss, called in regarding proposed bills HB05675 and HB05679. She talked about the path her family had been on. She felt that Connecticut has a good screening program, but when she compared it to other states, like Ohio, or Nebraska, she felt that we can do better. Her first bill is HB05675, and that's to mandate the preschool age. There are some towns that do it and some towns that don't, but if there's a mandate there, it would be much better because it would actually tell them they have to do this now.

And then there's Bill 05679, and that is to add more language to the current bill. She felt we needed more language there to help protect the kids. Based on her experience, she worries that kids are getting labeled with ADHD when, really, there was a hearing loss present.

The numbers can become staggering when you find out undiagnosed or onset hearing loss. There can be one in seven, or over 14 percent of school-aged children have hearing loss, and that's according to the American Academy of Audiology. Left undetected, a mild or unilateral hearing loss can result in delayed speech and language acquisition, social, emotional or behavioral problems and results in a lack of academic achievement.

There's more money spent per child going undiagnosed. There's a cost saving if there's a diagnosis put on, the sooner, the better. There are 20 percent of Connecticut children who fail the newborn hearing screening at this time who will be lost to follow-up. That's a big number. That's something we need to work at.

There was some discussion about the requirement for language and communication plans. She indicated that the information provided about these plans is not consistent and not well explained.

Harvey suggested if she wasn't already familiar, to work with CREC sound bridge in Wethersfield and the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford. Shari expressed concern over the bill being put forth to reduce education costs, by reducing certain vision, hearing and postural screening. Jeff told her would be very happy at another time to sit down and talk about the two raised bills. ASD would be very supportive and would be willing to testify.

Shari agreed to a request to write up a description of the two bills with a little bit of information and then contact information in case anybody has questions.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:19 p.m.

Next Meeting

April 6, 2015