

# NCDHH

Nebraska Commission  
for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



# NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

- The mission of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is to promote and advocate for Nebraskans who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind or Hard of Hearing; to achieve equality and opportunity in social, educational, vocational, and legal aspects impacting their daily lives; and to enhance and monitor access to effective communication and telecommunication technology.
- As a proactive and reactive state agency, the vision of the Commission strives to enhance collaboration in Nebraska by creating support, cooperation and understanding to achieve fairness and equality in all aspects of the mainstream for all Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans.

# BOARDS & COMMITTEES

## ■ **Full Commission Board:**

Consists of nine members who are appointed by the Governor subject to approval by the Legislature. Statute 71-4720 requires that a majority of the Commission members who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing shall be able to express themselves through sign language. The Commission members shall include three Deaf persons, three Hard of Hearing persons and three persons who have an interest in and knowledge of deafness and hearing loss issues. The Commission was created to improve the quality and coordination of existing services for deaf and hard of hearing people and development of new services when necessary.

## ■ **Interpreter Review Board:**

Created to develop guidelines and regulations for assuring competencies for sign language interpreters. Regulations were crafted and approved to include assurances that sign language interpreters have and maintain minimum levels of competency to interpret for state entities, courts, police and probation officials.

## ■ **Mental Health Advisory Committee:**

A special advisory committee is appointed by the Commission. Created to ensure full access of comprehensive mental health, alcoholism, and drug abuse services are available for Nebraskans who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

## ■ **Telecommunications Relay Service Advisory Committee:**

Mandated in 1990 to appoint members to serve on the Relay Advisory Committee administered by the Nebraska Public Service Commission. The Committee advises the Public Service Commission on matters related to the telecommunications relay system, the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program and its operations.

# Accomplishments

- **LB 965 / LB 839 Passed & Signed into Law**
  - Governor Pete Ricketts signed LB 965 into law. Sponsored by Sen. Mike McDonnell, LB 965 will require special language assessments for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The bill also includes provisions of LB 839, sponsored by Sen. Anna Wishart, recognizing American Sign Language as an official language in Nebraska.
  - NDE and NCDHH will publish a joint annual report specific to language and literacy development milestones of children who are deaf or hard of hearing relative to their peers who are not deaf or hard of hearing. The bill also allows NDE to provide for the teaching of American Sign Language in schools and students would obtain world language credit.
  - LEAD-K Committee and Subcommittees have been created and appointed. Work is already underway for LEAD-K!
- **Coffee with Cops Community Event**
  - February 2020 was our Coffee with Cops - a collaboration event between Lincoln Police Department and the Commission. This event invites the deaf and hard of hearing community to come out to a local coffee shop with members of law enforcement to share casual conversation and stories regarding community members experience with law enforcement.
- **Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at the Omaha Zoo / Scottsbluff Discovery Center**
  - One of the agency's annual outreach events is to invite Nebraska families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing to the Omaha & Scottsbluff zoos to raise awareness along with fun games, information and a Deaf-Connect story reading.
- **Interpreter Workshops**
  - Presented by Dr. Sabrina Smith – “Happy Days: It’s All About the Attitude” / “Be All That You Can Be: A Lesson in Confidence” / “Test: A Four Letter Word”
  - Interpreter workshops aim to enhance sign language interpreter’s knowledge, skills, attitude, ethical decision making and more.
- **Podcast series: A Moment with NCDHH**
  - Each episode features NCDHH Advocacy Specialists as they discuss information, resources and stories about their time at the Commission, helpful tips, and even some funny career bloopers! A benefit to virtual podcasts include engaging community members and allowing them to know our team members in all of our offices across Nebraska.
- **Dr. Frank Turk Excellence in Education Award**
  - The award is created in honor of Dr. Frank Turk with nearly half a century of experience in leadership and education roles including Gallaudet University, Superintendent at South Dakota School for the Deaf and state director of the North Carolina Services for the Deaf. Dr. Turk served two full terms on the NCDHH Full Board of Commissioners and is known as the “Father of the Deaf Youth of America” in his work on leadership training activities at schools across America.
  - 2020 Award recipient – Jonathan Scherling, American Sign Language Instructor at University of Nebraska – Omaha and current NCDHH Board Member.

## NCDHH COVID-19 RESPONSE



### COMMUNICATION ACCESS

- **Medical Settings:** NCDHH released formal and public communication to leaders and representatives of Nebraska hospitals emphasizing the need for a clear communication access plan, including the use of clear face masks
- **National White House Press Briefings:** NCDHH joined calls for action alongside National Association of the Deaf leadership asking the White House to make press briefings related to COVID-19 fully accessible with sign language interpreters
- **Local & State Press Conferences:** Collaboration with local and state officials advocating for sign language interpreters at Governor Ricketts press briefings as well as Omaha and Lincoln Mayors press conferences.
- **'Check In, Stay Connected' Campaign:** COVID-19 brought about feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, loneliness and stress. Our agency created this campaign to make sure members of the community have a safe place to go for support, information, and resources.

### EDUCATION

- **Agency VLOG** regarding education and communication access, emphasizing the transition from in-person to remote learning should include all accommodations necessary for children who are deaf or hard of hearing
- NCDHH Education Advocate working across the state with regional program coordinators, parents and educators to ensure students who are deaf or hard of hearing are experiencing effective transitions during COVID-19

### CLEAR FACE MASKS

- **Medical Settings:** NCDHH released formal and public communication to leaders and representatives of Nebraska hospitals emphasizing the need for a clear communication access plan, including the use of clear face masks
- **In the Classroom:** NCDHH sent formal correspondence to the Commissioner of the Nebraska Department of Education requesting the implementation of clear face masks in Nebraska school settings
- **At the Collegiate Level:** NCDHH reached out to University of Nebraska President requesting the use of clear face masks on Nebraska school campuses
- **Executive Director, John Wyvill,** spoke at Gov. Ricketts press conference on the importance of clear face masks during COVID-19

# NEBRASKA SPECIALIZED TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT (NSTEP) PROGRAM / HEARING AID BANKS

## NSTEP

- The State of Nebraska offers the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program (NSTEP). The goal of this program is to provide monetary assistance to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf/Blind, and Speech disabled Nebraskans to use for the purchase of specialized telephone equipment such as amplifiers, signaling devices, captioned telephones and mobile phones. Our advocacy specialists work with clients to assist them in finding the technology to best meet their unique needs and assist individuals in their application process.

NSTEP Applications  
Processed by NCDHH:

**81**

## HEARING AID BANKS

- NCDHH works with the Barkley Memorial Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, HearU Nebraska, Sertoma, and the Nebraska Lions Foundation to provide hearing aids to individuals who qualify. HearU Nebraska provides hearing aids to children ages birth-18. Sertoma is an international organization providing refurbished hearing aids to individuals 65+. The Nebraska Lions Foundation promotes the collection, refurbishing and distribution of donated hearing aids to Nebraska residents ages 19-64. Applications to these programs are available through the Commission.

- Lions
  - Applications Approved: **47**
  - Applications Denied: **36**
- Sertoma
  - Applications Approved: **93**
  - Applications Denied: **75**

## NCDHH – BY THE NUMBERS

The COVID-19 global pandemic brought about many changes, with NCDHH being no exception. The NCDHH team of Advocacy Specialists worked, adapted and changed their normal routine to ensure clients and organizations' needs were met virtually through education, presentations, and booths.

*Total Number of Presentations: 102*

*Presentation Attendees: 6,807*

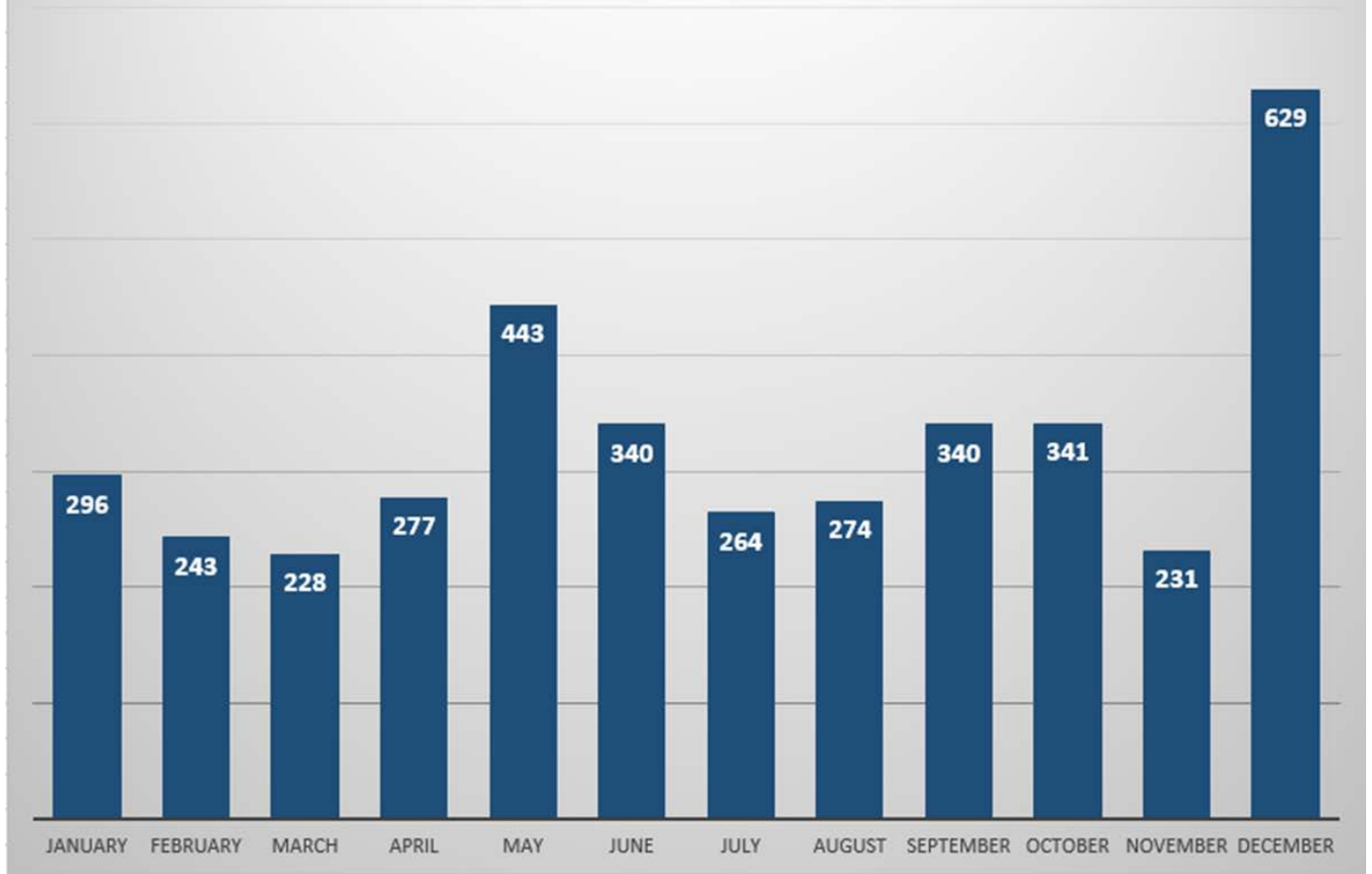
*Number of Booths: 10*

*Booth Attendees: 1,916*

*Walk-In Clients Assisted: 206*

*Total Clients Assisted: 3,906*

## Overall Clients Assisted January 1 - December 31, 2020



**Total Clients Assisted: 3,906**

## CLIENTS

NCDHH works continuously with individuals including but not limited to, Nebraska residents, organizations, stakeholder representatives, education representatives, parents and more. Our clients work with the NCDHH team member to educate, inform, provide assistance on our services including technology assistance, hearing aid banks, offering resources, educational information, presentations, trainings, and more.





## SOCIAL



*Top Post of 2020: 9,744 people reached:*  
LB 965 signed into law /  
Ceremonial bill signing LEAD-K  
and recognition of American  
Sign Language as an official  
language



### NCDHH Podcast Series & informative VLOGS (video blogs):

- A Moment with NCDHH
- Coffee with Cody
- Voter's Guide Series
- Tidbits with Kim
- COVID-19 Information
  - Education & Communication Access
  - Social Distancing Information
  - Clear Face Masks
  - Unemployment Resources



- Navigating the COVID-19 global pandemic brought about many changes – most notably, technology adaption.
- NCDHH conducted numerous meetings, trainings, and presentations via Zoom, allowing our team and community to be connected while still providing full communication access through the use of ASL Interpreters as well as captioning.
- Zoom Meetings, Trainings, Presentations included:
  - Training presentation by Cody McEvoy: “Zoom In on Deaf Awareness”
  - Deaf Culture training for NCDHH team by Richard McCowin
  - Facebook Live – current events & updates – John Wyvill, Cody McEvoy
  - Town Hall Meeting with Deaf & Hard of Hearing communities and stakeholders

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