

Approved December 8, 2023

**Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Full Commission Board Meeting
Held at - Omaha Association of the Deaf
4050 Hillside Ave, Omaha NE**

September 8, 2023 Meeting Minutes

A. Welcome

Chairperson Frances Beurivage called the meeting to order for the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Full Commission Board on September 8, 2023 at 8:29 a.m. at Omaha Association of the Deaf, 4050 Hillside Ave, Omaha Nebraska.

B. Notice of Open Meeting

Chairperson Frances Beurivage announced that the notice of the meeting was duly given, posted, published, and tendered in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and all Board Members received notice simultaneously by email. Publication of official notice of the meeting appeared in the September 1, 2023, edition of the Omaha World Herald, a legal newspaper of general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act. The agenda was kept current in the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's office and on the NCDHH website. The materials generally used by the Board for the meeting today are on a table in a public folder that is available to the general public for the purpose of this meeting in accordance with the Open Meetings Act {Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1412 (8)}. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is available for the duration of the meeting.

C. Roll Call

For the record, Board Members Ms. Candice Arteaga, Ms. Frances Beurivage, Ms. Brooke Fitzpatrick, Ms. Valerie "Vali" Hitz, Mr. Jonathan Scherling, Ms. Sandra Shaw, Ms. Diane Schutt and Ms. Peggy Williams were all present for roll call. NCDHH staff members present were Ms. Arlene Garcia Gunderson, Executive Director, Ms. Kelsey Cruz, Marketing & Communications Specialist, Ms. Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator, Ms. Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist, Ms. Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist, Ms. Gina Petersen, Administrative Assistant, Ms. Ashley Wulf, Advocacy Specialist and Ms. Cindy Woldt, Administrative Technician. Sign Language Interpreters present were Ms. Amber Tucker and Mr. Ben Sparks. Inclusive Communication Access Nebraska provided Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services by zoom.

D. Review of Agenda

Director Garcia Gunderson reviewed the agenda with the Board members.

E. Acceptance of Agenda

Ms. Peggy Williams moved to accept the agenda as presented. Ms. Diane Schutt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Hitz, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Ms. Williams all voting aye.

F. Acceptance of Minutes

Ms. Candice Arteaga moved to accept the June 16, 2023 meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Jonathan Scherling seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Hitz, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Ms. Williams all voting aye.

G. Chairperson of the Board's Report

1. Public Comments

Mr. Lance McWilliams shared with the Board members that he is interested in getting involved with NCDHH. Mr. McWilliams shared a bit of his background information with the members. Ms. Valerie "Vali" Hitz encouraged Mr. McWilliams to apply online for NCDHH Board membership.

Mr. Ben Soukup came forward to share with the Board members about the ASL Anywhere program. Mr. Soukup is looking forward to setting up services in Nebraska, sharing that their program's goal is to ensure every Deaf person has access to communication. Mr. Soukup also shared he is planning on meeting with the Public Service Commission (PSC) to see if they will be able to assist in providing funding for the program. Mr. Jonathan Scherling asked for clarification on what part of the state the program will serve, Omaha and Lincoln, or the rural areas. Mr. Soukup shared at this point they are only looking at the rural areas of the state in hopes to expand to the entire state.

Ms. Valerie "Vali" Hitz gave an update to the Board members regarding the recent Sign Camp that was held with 21 campers in attendance. This camp is for any child who uses American Sign Language (ASL), whether that is a child of the deaf adult (CODA), Deaf, hard of hearing or if they are oral. Ms. Hitz thanked the Board members for their support of the Sign Camp, and this is the third summer that they have had the camp.

2. Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS) / Public Service Commission (PSC) Discussion

Mrs. Tami Richardson – Nelson shared with the Board members regarding the Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS) Advisory Committee. Sharing with the Board the Deaf community would like to see a change to the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunication Program (NSTEP), which would allow for two phones per household. The current guideline is that each household can receive one phone and a signaling device every five years. Mrs. Richardson – Nelson is asking for assistance from NCDHH in making this change happen. This will involve NCDHH finding a Senator who is willing to sponsor the bill outlining the change. Ms. Peggy Williams asked if it would be beneficial for the Deaf and hard of hearing community to contact their senator for the change that is being requested. Ms. Candice Arteaga suggested NCDHH develops a

template for the members of the community to use when contacting their senator. Mrs. Richardson – Nelson stressed the PSC must remain neutral in this process, so this the reason she is coming to NCDHH for assistance in getting the suggested changes implemented.

Discussion between the members on the process for finding a Senator for sponsoring a bill.

Board Chairperson, Ms. Frances Beurivage thanked Mrs. Richardson – Nelson for her presentation to the Board.

3. Personnel Discussion (Closed Session)

Ms. Candice Arteaga made the motion to go into closed session at 9:00 a.m. Ms. Sandy Shaw seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Hitz, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Ms. Williams all voting aye.

Ms. Diane Schutt made the motion to go into open session at 10:00 a.m. Ms. Peggy Williams seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Hitz, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Ms. Williams all voting aye.

H. Executive Director Report

Director Garcia Gunderson opened her presentation outlining the out of state travel that has taken place with the agency.

Travel included:

- Hearing Loss Association of America Convention
 - Dates – June 29 to July 1, 2023
 - Ms. Susan Whitaker, Advocacy Specialist attended

- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Conference
 - Dates – July 25 – 29, 2023
 - Director Garcia Gunderson and Ms. Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator attended

- Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc (TDI) Biennial Conference
 - July 27 – 29, 2023
 - Ms. Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist attended

- National Black Deaf Advocate (NBDA) Conference and National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH) Conference
 - Dates – August 8 – 13, 2023
 - Director Garcia Gunderson attended

- Rochester Strong Site Visit
 - Dates – August 24 – 27, 2023
 - Director Garcia Gunderson attended

Director Garcia Gunderson invited Mrs. Tami Richardson – Nelson and Ms. Ronda Rankin to share with the Board regarding their travel to Rochester, NY for the site visit to the Deaf Strong Hospital event.

Ms. Rankin introduced herself, sharing that she has been a sign language interpreter for about 18 years, with 15 years being focused in healthcare. Ms. Rankin came to the meeting to discuss the Deaf Centric Hospital, which is modeled after Deaf Strong Hospital event in Rochester, NY. Ms. Rankin shared Deaf Centric Hospital is a simulated experience where medical students become patients and Deaf individuals take on the role of medical providers. In Rochester, it is required for all medical students to participate in the Deaf Centric Hospital. Ms. Rankin shared the history of her work in getting the Deaf Centric Hospital started in Nebraska with the medical schools in Omaha. In March 2023, Deaf Centric Hospital hosted their first event in Omaha at University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) with 23 student participating. Ms. Rankin added this was a successful event and received a lot of recognition.

Mrs. Tami Richardson – Nelson provided an event recap of the day which occurred in March 2023 at UNMC. Mrs. Richardson – Nelson provided a few scenarios of the event and how the Deaf and hard of hearing community and the medical students were involved. Mrs. Richardson – Nelson shared, during the debriefing, they received positive feedback from several students on how they have a better understanding and more empathy for deaf and hard of hearing challenges. Mrs. Tami Richardson – Nelson mentioned this feedback added to the success of the event.

Ms. Diane Schutt shared with the group that she thought this role playing experience is great as medical students gain an understanding of the challenges Deaf and hard of hearing patients face when visiting their doctor.

Ms. Peggy Williams added this is a phenomenal concept, wishing it could be carried throughout the entire state of Nebraska. She added that back in the 80's NCDHH did something very similar called Deaf Deaf World for the Lincoln and Omaha Police Departments.

Ms. Valerie "Vali" Hitz extended her appreciation for the Deaf Centric Hospital experience and voiced she would like to see NCDHH to continue to offer their support for this project.

Mrs. Tami Richardson - Nelson added the only way to make this experience sustainable is to have the buy in from medical schools such as UNMC. Ms. Rankin shared this event will now be a requirement for UNMC medical students to take part in the Deaf Centric Hospital.

Director Garcia Gunderson continued to share from the PowerPoint presentations and the top

accomplishments since being hired as the Executive Director of NCDHH.

Director Garcia Gunderson informed the Board of the vacant positions in the agency. Director Gunderson also informed the Board that the Human Resources (HR) department is short staffed leading to delays in getting positions posted. She added the Advocacy Specialist position in Lincoln recently posted.

Conversation continued among Board members on the open positions.

Director Garcia Gunderson presented to the members the Omaha office proposed renovation. The PowerPoint included pictures of the current Omaha office layout. She also shared the renovation suggestions are provided by the State of Nebraska Building Division and added the estimated cost for the renovation is just over \$350,000.

Discussion between the members on the renovation cost, and the other options available such as looking for a new location for the office. Ms. Ashley Wulf, Advocacy Specialist and Ms. Gina Petersen, Administrative Assistant and both located in the Omaha office, shared with the members their thoughts on why NCDHH should proceed with the proposed renovation for the Omaha office.

Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD) has received Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSHA) funding and is moving forward with trainings and hiring of Deaf mentors. Director Garcia Gunderson added NCDHH will partner with NeAD in providing American Sign Language (ASL) classes. Discussion between the members on the curriculum that will be used for teaching the ASL classes.

Director Garcia Gunderson asked for the Board members' approval in getting quarterly Board meetings live streamed, adding that this would be a great way to get more community involvement. NCDHH is looking at all that is involved in the process of live streaming the quarterly meetings.

Ms. Peggy Williams asked Director Garcia Gunderson what NCDHH is doing in relation to the hard of hearing and deaf blind communities? Director Garcia Gunderson replied she is still trying to figure out how the agency will work with the blind community, suggesting the possibility of adding Deaf-Blind to the agency name. Director Garcia Gunderson indicated she identified three advocacy specialists in the Scottsbluff, North Platte and Kearney offices to work with hard of hearing individuals. Ms. Williams replied it is important to remember that we have hard of hearing individuals everywhere throughout the entire state, not just in the Lincoln and Omaha areas.

Ms. Jackie Novak, Business and Finance manager for NCDHH, shared with the Board she is moving to a new format to outline the budget status to the members at the quarterly meetings. Conversation between the members on preferences.

Ms. Valerie “Vali” Hitz asked Ms. Novak how much of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds have been spent to date. Ms. Novak responded with roughly \$28,000 combined for the first fiscal year for both legal and rural.

Director Garcia Gunderson invited Ms. Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist manager to come forward to present to the Board.

Ms. Kim Davis shared with the Board members she meets with her team of Advocacy Specialists on a weekly basis by zoom. Her team is looking at enhancing some of the agency services and materials that are used, such as making the PowerPoint presentations standardized. Conversation on the other presentations Ms. Davis’s team is working on currently.

Ms. Davis shared she attended the Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc (TDI) conference in Maryland. The focus of the conference was digital inclusion. Ms. Davis thanks Director Garcia Gunderson for sending her to the conference and sharing what she learned with others in the agency.

Ms. Davis added another advocacy specialist attended the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) conference held in New Orleans. Ms. Davis mentioned there are several staff going to the upcoming National Association of the Deaf (NAD) National Leadership Training Conference. Ms. Davis mentioned one advocacy specialist will be attending the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA) Conference.

Ms. Davis mentioned she was informed by Director Garcia Gunderson Board members would like to start seeing staff monthly reports. Ms. Davis passed around a few copies of her reports for Board members to review.

Ms. Kelsey Cruz came forward to share the rebranding process for the Agency and provided the history behind the current logo. Ms. Cruz discussed her meeting with the Deaf owned graphic design agencies as they are assisting NCDHH in this process. Conversation between the members on what this process will look like for the agency.

Ms. Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator, shared information about her trip to the Registry of Interpreters (RID) Conference. NCDHH is offering a part two training by Ms. Regan Thibodeau in October for an interpreter training workshop that includes certified deaf interpreters (CDI). The last training was eye opening and very exciting. Ms. Sinkler added the number of licensed interpreters has dwindled a bit due to some retirements. Conversation between the members regarding the number of sign language interpreters and certified deaf interpreters (CDI) in Nebraska.

Mr. Jonathan Scherling made the motion to accept the Executive Director report as presented. Ms. Candice Arteaga seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Hitz, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Ms. Williams all voting aye.

I. Committee Reports

Discussion between the members on the need to have the Legislative Committee meet soon. This committee includes Mr. Jonathan Scherling, Ms. Brooke Fitzpatrick, Ms. Peggy Williams, along with Director Garcia Gunderson and Ms. Kelsey Cruz.

J. Old Business

Nothing to report.

K. New Business

Nothing to report.

L. Adjourn

Ms. Diane Schutt moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:49 a.m. Ms. Sandy Shaw seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Ms. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Hitz, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Ms. Williams all voting aye.

Next Meeting Date

- December 8, 2023 – 4600 Valley Rd, Room 4A, Lincoln.