



Board Member Handbook

Updated November 10, 2021



Pete Ricketts

Governor

Candice Arteaga

Chairperson of the Board
Greenwood

Robert Feit

Vice Chair
Lincoln

Frances Beurivage

Secretary
Lincoln

Vali Hitz

Board Member
Raymond

Jonathan Scherling

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Diane Schutt

Board Member
Fairbury

Dr. Joshua Sevier

Board Member
Omaha

Sandra Shaw

Board Member
Seward

Peggy Williams

Board Member
Lincoln

John Wyvill

Executive Director
john.wyvill@nebraska.gov

Dear Board Member:

Welcome to the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH).

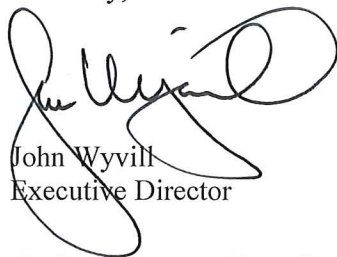
It is an honor to have you on our board and to be working with you towards common goals in serving people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Nebraska.

By agreeing to serve as a Board Member for the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, you have shown a willingness to be part of an exciting team that strives to improve the lives of people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Because of your leadership, guidance and support, the Commission's efforts and goals in ensuring equal access for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in all state and local agencies in Nebraska can be accomplished.

The purpose of this handbook will provide you with an orientation and history of NCDHH which was developed to answer some of your preliminary questions about the foundation of the Commission and your duties as a Board Member.

I look forward to working with you and hope that you will find the time you serve on the Commission a valuable experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Wyvill', written over a printed name and title.

John Wyvill
Executive Director

Mission and Vision Statements

Mission Statement

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.

Vision Statement

As a proactive and reactive state agency, the Commission strives to enhance collaboration 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.

Goals and Benchmarks of the Board for NCDHH

1. Provide and promote services and training to create awareness through the delivery of programs designed to empower Deaf, Nebraskans who are Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing

- a) Educate consumers on their legal rights under federal and state laws
- b) Educate consumers on available technology, equipment and telecommunication access options and services
- c) Train consumers on self-empowerment and self-advocacy
- d) Advocate to service providers, organizations, and governmental agencies in support of people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing to assure that the rights and benefits are available to that consumer
- e) Educate parents of children who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing about opportunities available to their children
- f) Advocate with parents to assure equal access to quality education for children who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and/or Hard of Hearing.

2. Implement and maintain programs through collaboration with consumer groups, the Governor, legislature, organizations, service providers, and governmental agencies and units

- a) Establish access to effective and accessible communication through various mediums
- b) Identify and collaborate with stakeholders, agencies, organizations, hospitals, social service entities, law enforcement agencies and educational institutions to identify gaps in service and work together to resolve those issues and build a relationship in the process
- c) Educate consumers and especially low income families on acquisition and use of telecommunication through internet accessibility
- d) Educate staffs at hospitals, jails, law enforcement and care facilities regarding access rights and reasonable accommodations for clients who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing
- e) In collaboration with appropriate state agencies and service providers, promote the establishment and installation of public access videophones

- f) Collaborate with various organizations to help individuals who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing access personal-social programs and other types of programs
- g) Collaborate with agencies and consumers on home and community disaster preparedness plans.
- h) In collaboration with appropriate state agencies and service providers, promote the establishment and implementation of accurate weather alerting services through weather and general emergency alerting devices
- i) Work closely with parent groups, Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing organizations, and school units to empower students who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing through developing leadership skills and deaf awareness activities
- j) Work closely with higher education institutions to develop better sign language skills in teachers and interpreters

3. Initiate, broaden and maintain the collection and dissemination of information regarding the strategies for living with, the prevention of, and the impact of deafness and hearing loss

- a) Promote community awareness about programs and services operated by NCDHH
- b) Initiate a viable and reliable system for developing a census of people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing in Nebraska
- c) Update the media lending library and newsletters in order to increase usage by clients
- d) Provide information through the NCDHH web page by increasing the use of vlogs and video presentations and by redesigning the web site
- e) Develop information packets and resources on home safety issues for placement on the NCDHH website
- f) Research, gather and expand the dissemination of information through electronic and/or visual mediums
- g) Disseminate brochures and service information on a scheduled basis to identified groups such as audiologists, professional groups, hospitals, nursing homes, Interpreter Training Programs, and private business groups
- h) Increase traffic to our web site using contact with other agencies; e.g., insert our links to other web sites

4. Ensure and monitor full access to comprehensive and appropriate mental health, alcoholism and substance abuse services for people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing by collaborating with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and behavioral health service providers

- a) Create recommended strategies to assist adults and youth in coping with late onset of hearing loss
- b) Establish a domestic violence/sexual assault support system in Nebraska
- c) Establish a alcohol drug/substance abuse support system in Nebraska Establish training programs to educate staffs at all Nebraska behavioral health programs
- d) Provide mental health/substance abuse training to certified and licensed interpreters in Nebraska
- e) Establish local support systems with mental health providers, domestic violence programs, regional programs
- f) Identify, contact and provide hearing loss/deaf awareness to agencies, programs & services that provide mental health, addictions and abuse services (support groups, eating disorder clinics, AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), NA (Narcotics

Anonymous), communication access, equipment and technology for existing programs)

- g) Work closely with NCDHH Staff Assistant for IT and Interpreter Program Assistant to provide information mental health-related topics and issues through the NCDHH web page by increasing the use of vlogs and video presentations and by redesigning the web site (See 4. D.)

5. Ensure and implement access to effective and quality interpreting services by collaborating with consumer groups, organizations, service providers, and governmental agencies and units

- a) Promote and/or provide interpreter training in cooperation with other organizations and agencies
- b) Monitor the licensing of sign language interpreters
- c) Promote and encourage sign language interpreters to be certified and licensed in Nebraska
- d) Provide review of alleged violations of rules and regulations governing the sign language interpreters
- e) Recruit qualified interpreters
- f) Implement and maintain an effective and efficient referral system
- g) Implement and maintain a system to measure, maintain and improve interpreter's skills
- h) Inform consumer groups and agencies how to use an interpreter, use of complaint procedures, and the NCDHH referral system
- i) Establish a system for recognizing Nebraska interpreters
- j) Coordinate with state and national interpreter groups to ensure maintenance of certification

Selection of Persons as Board Members

Nebraska Revised Statute §71-4720 states “There is hereby created the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing which shall consist of nine members to be appointed by the Governor subject to approval by the Legislature. 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. A majority of the commission members who are deaf or hard of hearing shall be able to express themselves through sign language. Employees of any state agency other than employees of the commission shall be eligible to serve on the commission. When appointing members to the commission, the Governor shall consider recommendations from individuals, organizations, and the public.”

The Board Members are the policymakers of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and also determines the goals and programs that direct the actions of the staff. The Board Members evaluates how well the Executive Director establishes the policies and goals while carrying out the Commission's vision and mission.

STATE OF NEBRASKA REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

Direct Deposit

According to N.R.S. §81-1117.05 “The Department of Administrative Services may make payments that include, but are not limited to, wages and reimbursable expenses to state employees by electronic funds transfer or a similar means of direct deposit. For purposes of this section, state employee means any person or officer employed by the state who works a full-time or part-time schedule on an ongoing basis.” All reimbursements for expenses must be made by electronic funds transfer (EFT)/Direct Deposited into a personal checking or savings account or to a state authorized debit card.

W-9 Form

In order to receive reimbursement for expenses State Accounting requires that a completed W-9 be submitted to NCDHH. An updated W-9 shall be completed and submitted to the agency’s Business Manager any time there is a change with banking information or residential address.

Accountability and Disclosure Form and Requirement

N.R.S. §49-14, 108 states “Each person appointed to the commission by the Governor or the Secretary of State shall file with the commission a statement of financial interests, pursuant to sections [49-1493](#) to [49-14,104](#), prior to assuming his or her duties or prior to the legislative confirmation hearing, whichever occurs first. Each person appointed to the commission by the Governor or the Secretary of State shall file with the commission a statement of financial interests, pursuant to sections 49-1493 to 49-14,104, prior to assuming his or her duties or prior to the legislative confirmation hearing, whichever occurs first.”

Public officials and certain employees of the State of Nebraska are subject to laws requiring the disclosure of personal financial interests, interests in contracts with government and potential conflicts of interests. Board Members are considered public officials. This form ensures that you are free of conflicts of interests in your position on the Board.

As a Board Member you will be notified by the Business Manager when an updated form needs to be submitted. Persons who fail to timely file reports of statements are subject to late filing fees. For more information, visit their website: <http://www.nadc.state.ne.us>

As a Board Member of NCDHH, you cannot make a financial profit from your service on the Board. You cannot accept gifts or any form of gratuities in return for voting a certain way or encouraging the NCDHH to accept a business or provide a specific type of service.

Expenses

A Board Member may be reimbursed for expenses incurred when doing business as a Board Member for NCDHH. Any expenses submitted for reimbursement will follow the State Accounting guidelines. To receive reimbursement for expenses the State Accounting approved Expense Reimbursement Document (ERD) must be completed and submitted within 60 days of the date the expenses were incurred.

Expenses submitted after 60 days from the date they were incurred will not be reimbursed. The ERD can be found within the Board Member portal. All policies are subject to the current State Accounting Manual.

Mileage

Board Members will be reimbursed for use of a personal vehicle while on State business if an Expense Reimbursement Document is submitted according to the previously mentioned requirements. The reimbursement rate is the standard rate as established by the Internal Revenue Service through its Revenue Procedures. This mileage rate is effective for all Board Members. However, agencies may, at their determination, require Board Members to utilize state-owned vehicles (as opposed to personal vehicles) if the use of the state-owned vehicle would be more economical from both an auto rental rate and the time involved in renting the state-owned vehicle. If after such agency determination, the Board Members still wants to drive their personal vehicle, the agency is not required to reimburse the Board Member any more than it would have cost the agency to rent the state-owned vehicle. All policies are subject to the current State Accounting Manual.

When using your personal vehicle, you should document the actual mileage driven. Verify the mileage submitted is correct by checking Mapquest or another mapping website.

Meals

Overnight Travel - Pursuant to Section 81-1174, Board Members traveling on State business shall claim only actual amounts paid for food/meals. Board Members should not submit claims based on any per diem amount. (The Federal maximum per diem rates are only a guideline and should NOT be claimed). When requesting or approving food/meal costs, compare the average cost per day for the entire trip with the appropriate daily GSA rate. Exceeding the GSA daily rate by a small amount fits the State definition of reasonableness. Reasonableness in very limited cases may exceed such rates by larger amounts; however, the reasons must be fully documented. No reimbursement may be made for alcoholic beverages.

Meals can be reimbursed if:

Breakfast - When an employee leaves for overnight travel at or before 0630, breakfast may be reimbursed.

Lunch - When an employee leaves for overnight travel at or before 1100 or returns from overnight travel at or after 1400, the noon meal may be reimbursed.

Supper - When an employee leaves for overnight travel at or before 1700 or returns from overnight travel at or after 1900, the evening meal may be reimbursed.

All submitted claims for food/meals need to be adequately substantiated. A detailed receipt is required as support for all expenditures. According to the State Accounting Manual a detailed receipt is a receipt that shows a listing of each item purchased and the related cost. Detailed receipt does not include the receipt copy that only identifies an amount is being charged to the employee's credit card. In the absence of detailed receipts supporting an employee's claim, State Accounting will require a written acknowledgment that after-the-fact documentation will be provided. This documentation may be a copy of:

- Cancelled check;
- Charge card slip and signed written explanation; or
Subsequently acquired receipt and signed written explanation.
- If receipts have been lost, or where a receipt was not provided (such as when only one meal receipt is provided per table), the employee should create and present an affidavit.

Lodging

Board Members shall report only actual expenses paid for lodging. Parking charges incurred at the lodging site may be included on the lodging bill. Lodging expenses may either be directly billed to NCDHH or claimed on an expense reimbursement. If lodging is submitted on an expense reimbursement, detailed receipts for lodging are required to be filed with the claim. Lodging may be reimbursed when an employee is "away from home overnight".

It is State Accounting policy that a person generally be more than 60 miles from his or her workplace in order to be eligible for lodging. On occasion there may be reasons to pay lodging for distances less than 60 miles. Such reasons include, but are not limited to work requirements, medical conditions or weather; in those instances the reason must be clearly stated on the disbursement document.

Expectations for the Board Members

CODE OF ETHICS

Each Board Member shall comply with the following Code of Ethics:

1. Board Members shall carryout their duties with honesty and integrity.
2. Board Members shall comply with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations in the performance of their duties as a Board Member serving the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
3. Board Members shall not use or attempt to use their official positions to secure unwarranted privileges or exemptions for themselves or others.
4. Board Members shall maintain confidentiality about all matters that are considered in closed meetings.
5. Board Members shall exercise due diligence to avoid breaches of duty via negligence, intentional action or omission, and unauthorized communications with individuals trying to influence by improper means or seeking to receive personal gains through Board decisions. Board Members recognize that all Board decisions and actions are to be based on integrity, competence, and independent judgment on the merits and benefits to people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Nebraska.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Each Board Member shall comply with the following codes of conduct:

1. Board Members shall not engage in conduct that would compromise, discredit, or diminish the integrity of the Board and/or the Commission.
2. The Board will respect the authority of the Executive Director in daily operational matters of the Commission and will provide instruction and direction only to the Executive Director.
3. Board Members will be sensitive to the considerable workload of the staff when making requests for assistance and all requests for assistance shall obtain the Executive Director's approval.
4. The Board will respect the Executive Director's authority in all personnel matters.

Individual members of the Board shall not give orders or instructions to any employee of the Commission. This does not preclude an individual member from offering his or her opinion, based upon his or her expertise and/or experience, when an employee of the Commission requests such an opinion.

1. Individual Board Members are not to become involved in operational management of the Commission.
2. This does not include any Board Member serving as an acting Executive Director while awaiting the return of the Executive Director from an approved leave of absence or the hiring of a new Executive Director.
3. Board Members will strive to establish sound working relationships with each other by taking time to know and appreciate each other as individuals.
4. Board Members will be respectful of each other and will not utilize Board meetings to upstage or embarrass colleagues.
5. Board Members will respectfully consider the opinions of others during deliberations, strive for integration of viewpoints or consensus building in decision-making, and will respect the judgment of the Board in regards to its decisions.
6. Individual Board Members shall refer all proposals, concerns, grievances or any other communications regarding potential or existing programs, services, or persons related to NCDHH to a member of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will review the communication and present it to the Full Board if the matter requires the attention of the Full Board or refer it to the Executive Director if the matter can be handled without a vote by the Board.

Role, Function, and Responsibilities of Board Members

It is the duty of the Board Member to:

1. Attend regularly and special meetings to achieve a quorum
2. Participate in the discussions of the issues on hand
3. Be prepared for the meetings by reading all materials prior to the meetings
4. Participates in committee activities either during regular Commission meeting or scheduled meetings outside of regular scheduled meetings
5. Establish policy, duties and regulations for NCDHH
6. Make decisions on general budgetary issues
7. Establish long range planning, goals and benchmarks for the goals
8. Be ready to accept positions of leadership
9. Review the financial statements carefully and ask for explanation of any items not understood.
10. Approve strategic plans, three-year goals and benchmarks for the goals
11. Represent the Commission to the public and to the community
12. Be well-versed on the needs and issues of the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing people
13. Represent the people that you serve
14. Participate in committees

15. Participate in the selection, evaluation and replacement of the Executive Director. In the event that the Executive Director is not able to complete his/her duties due to extraordinary circumstances or resignation of the Executive Director, determine how to provide qualified administrative leadership to the Commission staff either by assigning a Board Member the role of administrative leader or selecting a current employee to serve as an interim Executive Director. Long term is defined as any absence of 10 or more days
16. Ensure the continuity of the Commission.

Committee Expectations

Each Board Member is expected to serve on a committee of the Commission. Currently there are four committees: Executive, Legislative, Interpreting Issues, and Educational Issues. These four committees review specific issues and present such to the Commission Board for action or discussion. It is possible that a Board Member might serve on two or more committees.

Role and Function of Officers

Chairperson - It is the duty of the chairperson to review and approve the proposed Full Commission meeting agenda and make recommendations. It is also the duty of the Chairperson to call the meeting to order at the appointed time, to preside at all the meetings, to announce the business before the assembly in its proper order, to state publicly questions properly brought before the assembly, to preserve order and decorum, and to decide all questions of order (subject to appeal). When he/she "puts a question" to vote, when speaking upon an appeal, or otherwise presiding over any motion or discussion, he/she can sit. In all cases where his/her vote would affect the result, or where the vote is by ballot, he/she can vote. He/she should not interrupt a speaker so long as he/she is in order, but should listen to his/her speech, which should be addressed to him/her and not to the assembly. The chairperson should be careful to abstain from the appearance of partisanship, but he/she has the right to call another member to the chair while he/she addresses the assembly on a question. When speaking to a question or order, the Chairperson does not vacate the chair. The chairperson oversees the evaluation process of the Executive Director. The person selected as the Chairperson may serve up to two consecutive terms of one year as Chair.

Vice Chairperson – It is the duty of the Vice-Chairperson to preside over the Commission meetings in the absence of the Chairperson. The person serving as Vice-Chairperson may serve only two consecutive one-year terms as Vice-Chair.

Secretary – It is the duty of the Board Secretary to assist the NCDHH Business Manager in keeping minutes of all meetings. The Secretary records all motions; takes roll call; notes any significant comments or actions of the Board; and highlights minutes of the previous board meeting when requested by the Chairperson. The Secretary will serve as Acting Chair or Vice Chair in the absence of the Chairperson or Vice Chairperson at the board meetings. The Secretary assumes the position of Vice Chair when the terms have been completed. The person serving as Secretary may serve up to two consecutive terms of one year as Secretary.

I. Annual Performance Evaluation of the Executive Director

On the annual anniversary of the Executive Director's employment the Board will review the Executive Director's work performance by a performance evaluation. The Executive Director will be evaluated by the staff of the Commission as well as by the members of the Board. Prior to the board meeting that is nearest the employment anniversary of the Executive Director, the Business Manager will correspond with the Board's Executive Committee regarding the communication of the performance evaluations that will be completed between the staff and the Board Members.

Once the performance evaluations are completed and collected by the Business Manager, he/she will deliver them to the Board's Executive Committee. The Board Chairperson will distribute them to the remaining Board Members.

To ensure 100% Confidentiality, the Business Manager will request that the performance evaluations be typed and mailed or put in he/she's office mailbox in a sealed envelope.

In addition to the performance evaluations, Commission Chairperson will ask the Executive Director to highlight their accomplishments and activities for the previous year. The Executive Director is to submit the report to the Commission's Board Chairperson by the agreed upon date between them.

At the board meeting closest to the Executive Director's employment anniversary the Board will enter into a closed session to review the Executive Director's performance. The Business Manager will provide budget information regarding the Executive Director's salary if the Board votes to give the Executive Director a salary increase.

The Chairperson:

- Presents the summary of the results
- Guides the discussion regarding the Executive Director's evaluation
- Guides the discussion regarding the Executive Director's salary review.
- Entertains motions regarding the increase in pay (Note: the motion must be made in open session but can be discussed and prepared in closed session).
- Reminds the Board Members that the evaluation specifics and summaries; in short, the discussion, are confidential.
- Invite the Executive Director to the closed meeting and shares the decision of the Commission Board regarding the evaluation and status of pay.
- Reopens the meeting by asking for a motion to do so.
- Ask for motions regarding the Executive Director's pay status and percentage increase if any.

Operations of the Board

Meetings of the Board

- A. Meeting Rules
 1. Six (6) members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum.
 2. Written notice of the date, time and place of all meetings shall be sent to each member not less than ten (10) days before the date of the meeting.
- B. Meeting Schedule
 1. The Commission shall hold at least four (4) meetings a year.

2. A public meeting notice shall be conducted for each meeting of the Full Commission by placing notice in area newspapers of general circulation within the State if reasonable, ten (10) days prior to each meeting.
- C. Emergency Meetings
1. The Board Chairperson upon recommendation by any Board Member or the Executive Director can call an emergency meeting as deemed necessary.
- D. Meeting Procedures
1. All meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the Nebraska Public Meeting Act. A copy of the Open Meeting Act will be made available at all board meetings. (See Appendix D)
 2. All business shall be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, Revised Edition.
 3. The Board shall limit discussion and actions to items contained on the approved agenda.
 - a. Proposed agenda items can be submitted by the Full Commission members.
 - b. The board meeting packet shall be available for review to the Board Members no later than 7 days prior to the board meeting on the Board Member Portal. If the Board Member prefers, a hard copy of the packet will be mailed to the Board Member.
 4. There shall be a public comment section, during which any person or group can address the Full Board. The Commission members shall establish the length of the public comments.
 5. The minutes of each meeting shall be emailed after the meeting within ten (10) working days to the Board Members as well as placed on the Board Member Portal. The minutes are “draft” minutes until approved at the next Board meeting with any changes or additions that Board Members deem necessary to add.
 6. All meeting sites used by the Commission shall be free of communication and architectural barriers and accessible for all individuals.

Board Member Committees: The committees meet either between meetings of the Board or during the regular board meetings; and serves in an advisory capacity to the Board. A formal vote by the full Board shall be recorded for any recommendations of the committees. The term for each committee shall be for one year or until their replacement has been elected. If one of the committee members is unable to attend the meeting, the chairperson shall request another Board Member fill in for the absentee committee member.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee's serves as the personnel committee that develops and revises personnel policies as needed for approval by the full Board. The Executive Committee also performs such duties in the management of the Commission as may be directed or delegated by the Full Commission. Members serving on this committee include the chair, vice-chair, and secretary of the Board.

Legislative Committee

The role of the Legislative Committee is to develop, monitor, and recommend changes to

current NCDHH State Statute or new legislation that will benefit people who are deaf and hard of hearing people in cooperation with the various organizations serving the deaf or hard of hearing community. This committee must meet prior to the beginning of the legislative session (fall) to formulate bills and be active during the legislative session.

Interpreter Committee

The role of the Interpreter Committee is to review and update interpreter best practices, sign language evaluation systems and internal procedures.

Education Committee

The role of the Education Committee is to reviews ways to educate the general public, state agencies, public entities, and people who are themselves Deaf or Hard of Hearing about the impact of hearing loss in general. Specifically, the Education Committee seeks ways to implement the vision, mission and goals of the Commission through awareness activities. In addition, the Education Committee reviews issues emanating from educational practices, rules, and legislation.

Recognition Committee

The role of the Recognition Committee is to review and recommend awards for any outstanding work by staff of the agency. The Full Board has approved an awards and recognition policy for the agency's staff. The policy also applies to the Interpreter Review Board. See Appendix E.

HISTORY OF THE COMMISSION

The objectives organized units of the Deaf society (clubs and state associations) are to improve the quality of life of deaf citizens. However, there is a significant or monumental gap between intent and achievement. Leadership in the Deaf community usually consists of working people with family obligations for whom community service intrudes on fundamental needs of greater importance. This problem has increased in magnitude because of the general trend where both parents are working, resulting in a correspondingly greater involvement in home-oriented activities.

A DREAM BECOMES A REALITY

It is unknown who had the idea of establishing a Commission for the Hearing Impaired. Nevertheless, it was recognized that services provided should be made available to all deaf and hard of hearing people in Nebraska. At the time the push began for a state commission in Nebraska, only a handful of states had a similar agency.

The Nebraska Association for the Deaf made the attainment of this objective a high priority. There were several meetings in both Omaha and Lincoln. In addition there was some TV exposure. Prominent government representatives and civic leaders gave their support. When Senator Bernice Laebetz agreed to sponsor the bill, the battle was half won. The 1979 Unicameral passed LB 101 and with the signature of Governor Thone, NCHI became a reality. The formal announcement of the newly appointed Commission members was made at a banquet held at Peony Park.

The names of the first nine Commission Members are as follows:

<u>Names</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
Henry Barthuly	Mitchell
Gerald Hoffmaster	York
James E. Kamas	Lincoln
Berton Leavitt	Lincoln
Betty Lof	Omaha
Dr. George Propp	Lincoln
Beverly Steskal	Omaha
Dr. Patricia Sullivan	Omaha
Beverly Thomas	Kearney

Their appointments were effective as of August 13, 1979. The first Commission meeting was held on September 28-29, 1979. The first year budget was \$150,000.

THE BEGINNING

The new Commission faced a formidable task. Funding for the new Commission was quite generous. However, the functions of NCHI were, as it should be, very general. The Commission members had to develop all of the details. There was little or no precedent for an agency of this kind, and most of the Commission members were unfamiliar with the way the State operates. We were fortunate that the first person hired was Jaime Galloway who was formerly employed in the State Department of Education. The Commission is indebted to Chairman Jim Kamas who always seemed to know where to find the answers. Dr. George Propp was the key individual in developing the organizational structure.

Although NCHI came into being in 1979, it was the beginning of 1980 before the appropriate staff was hired and trained. Jaime Galloway, the first Executive Director, started on February 1st, and other staff members were hired shortly thereafter. Initially there was only the Lincoln office. The original staff, in addition to Jaime Galloway, consisted of Eleanor Propp (Community Liaison Specialist), Suzanne Shackelford (Field Representative) and Karen Detmer (Secretary). The rest is history, which is documented in activity reports that follow.

NCHI activities are documented within filing cabinets full of records and pictures. These activities are summarized in sections that follow. The following paragraphs will highlight some of the accomplishments that have made a difference in the lives of deaf and hard of hearing Nebraskans.

OMAHA OFFICE

On July 1, 1981, additional funding was obtained and an office was opened in Omaha at the Nebraska School for the Deaf. The Omaha personnel were Tanya D. Wendel, who later became the Executive Director, and a part-time secretary (Mary Jo Jurek). A second field representative, Richard McCowin, was added in January of 1982.

HI-VIS

In April 1982, the Legislature appropriated funding for HI-VIS (Hearing Impaired Video Information System). This was a successful collaborative effort with Nebraska Educational Television (NETV). HI-VIS was piggy-backed on AGRI-VIS which provided information via Line 21 to farmers. HI-VIS became operational on August 16, 1982, and was the envy of deaf people everywhere. Eventually, this was discontinued.

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NCDHH began receiving funds from the Department of Education Regional Interpreter Training Grant to conduct training workshops for sign language interpreters throughout Nebraska.

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING LAW

In 1987, a bill was introduced to revise and expand existing statutes for using sign language interpreters. This provided the basis for the vast increase in interpreting services that have become available to the deaf and hard of hearing citizens of Nebraska. This bill required that all state agencies, law enforcement agencies and the Nebraska court system must use licensed sign language interpreters.

TTY RELAY SERVICES

In 1980, NCHI provided TTY relay services by contracting with answering services in both Omaha and Lincoln. As the number of TTY's increased, this service became inadequate during peak hours, and TTY users demanded more effective services. The bill to provide this service was developed in 1989, but failed to obtain priority. It was revived in 1990 as LB 240 and, with the help of some parliamentary procedures, the bill passed and was signed by Governor Kay Orr. The Nebraska Relay Service became operational in January of 1991. When TTY relay industry began to expand and become more national, this service was discontinued.

VOLUNTARY CENSUS

One of NCDHH's major on-going activities has been the voluntary census. The census identifies deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Nebraska and provides the state legislators an idea of the population served by NCDHH.

QAST: QUALITY ASSURANCE SCREENING TEST

In 1991, the Commission trained sign language evaluators and started offering the testing for the Quality Assurance Screening Test (QAST). QAST is a screening instrument that measures an individual's knowledge of the interpreters Code of Ethics and assesses their sign performance. Levels of skills were assigned based on the QAST. This was later contracted to a private evaluator firm.

EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETERS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In February of 1992, NCDHH initiated discussion with the Nebraska Department of Education to address qualifications of educational interpreters in the public schools. As a result, a task force was established and an action plan developed for the state. This resulted in the development of educational interpreters who were assessed by evaluators using the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) model.

EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETER WORKSHOPS

In 1993, the Commission received a grant award from the Nebraska Department of Education Comprehensive Systems for Personnel Development (CSDP), to provide training opportunities throughout the school year for educators, interpreters and parents. Over 70 hours of training on the topic of educational interpreting was offered. This project was expanded and funded for two additional years.

EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETERS PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (EIPA)

In October 1993, training was conducted on an assessment tool for evaluating educational interpreters. There were 17 individuals trained to become evaluators using the EIPA, authored by Williams/Schick (1992). The evaluators received 20 hours of training in using the instrument and evaluations of educational interpreters working in the public schools occurred in 1994-1995.

ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICE-LOAN PROGRAM

In October 1994, the Telephone Pioneers of America approved the expansion of the equipment loan programs to include assistive listening devices for hard of hearing people. Individuals are able to loan the equipment for a two-month period. This was discontinued.

MENTAL HEALTH LEGISLATION

During the 1995 Legislative Session, Legislative Bill 25 (Sections 71-4728.02 to 7128.03) was passed and went into effect on September 7, 1995. This bill allowed NCDHH to hire a mental health specialist who monitors and provides advice to mental health, alcoholism, and drug abuse programs that provide treatment to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

In 1995, a sister bill to the Telecommunications Relay System Act (86-1302 to 86-1306) was passed to provide for specialized telecommunications equipment to qualified low-income deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech impaired persons in Nebraska. This led to the formation of Nebraska Specialized Telecommunication Equipment Program (NSTEP) in partnership with the Nebraska Public Services Commission.

ARTS FESTIVAL

Beginning in April of 1995, the Commission conducted an annual arts festival in cooperation with Nebraska School for the Deaf and the Deaf community. The arts festival highlighted a variety of artwork and talent done by children and adults. The festival included crafters and a host of activities for both children and adults. The arts festival was held in the spring of 1995,

1996 and 1997. With the closing of the Nebraska School for the Deaf, the Art Festival was discontinued.

RID APPROVED SPONSOR

In October 1996, the Commission was approved as a sponsor of continuing education activities for sign language interpreters through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). One major area is the continuing education unit (CEU) credits available to interpreters so they can maintain their certification and licenses. This is ongoing today.

COMMISSION NAME CHANGE LEGISLATION-EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETERS

On September 12, 1997, the legislation that impacted the changing of our name from Nebraska Commission for the Hearing Impaired (NCHI) to the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) took effect. The legislation broadened and modified language in our existing statutes. The legislation also included provisions that require the Department of Education to implement guidelines and adopt rules and regulations for educational interpreters. The rules and regulations apply to all educational interpreters employed for the 2001-02 school year and all years thereafter.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND NEW OFFICES

The Full Commission Members requested that the Commission staff expand travel throughout Nebraska. A field representative from the Omaha area is traveling the state one to two weeks a month to underserved areas of the state. Linkages have been established with the Division of Rehabilitation in Scottsbluff, Services for the Visually Impaired in North Platte and the League of Human Dignity in Norfolk for use of office space during our trips. This led to the establishment of an office in North Platte and in Scottsbluff. In 2010, due to budget cuts, the office in Scottsbluff was closed. To accommodate the needs of far western Nebraska, staff once again was asked to travel for a number of days to meet deaf and hard of hearing people in rural Nebraska.

THE FUTURE OF NCDHH

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing takes considerable pride in its many accomplishments. We continue to look into an evolution of goals and purposes to keep attuned to changing trends and needs. In a strategic planning move, NCDHH began a shift toward a service-centered model.

PERSONNEL

Employees are covered by either the Nebraska Classified System Personnel Rules and Regulations or the NAPE/ASFCME and State of Nebraska Labor Contract. These are accessible on the Department of Administrative Services website: <http://das.nebraska.gov/emprel/>. In addition, there is also a Commission Personnel Policies Handbook that either clarifies the position of the Commission or interprets how state personnel policies and the NAPE/ASFCME contract are applied to the Commission.

Position(s) covered by the Nebraska Classified System Personnel Rules and Regulations are as follows and is a non-exempt position:

Business Manager II

Position(s) covered by the NAPE/AFSCME and State of Nebraska Labor Contract is as follows and are non-exempt positions:

Staff Assistant II

Administrative Assistant I

Interpreter Program Assistant

Field Representative II

Mental Health Specialist

Public Information Officer

NON-COVERED/EXEMPT EMPLOYEE:

Executive Director

The Role of Executive Director:

Handles day to day operations involved with running the agency

Develops and implement the annual budget.

Interviews and hires staff when needed

Supervises staff

Strategic Planning for the agency with approval from the Board

Handles staff grievances/discipline

Reports to the Commission members

Organizational Chart

