

**FISCAL YEARS 2021-2022 & 2022-2023**

**NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL FOR  
THE DEAF AND THE HARD OF HEARING**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**



# ANNUAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEARS 2021-2022 & 2022-2023

**T**he members of the North Carolina Council for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing (Council) hereby submits this Annual Report for fiscal years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 as part of their public accountability to the Governor, legislators, and taxpayers of North Carolina.

This Annual Report delineates the Council's activities in the past two fiscal years. The Council met quarterly on the First Friday of August 2021, November 2021, February 2022, May 2022, August 2022, November 2022, February 2023, and May 2023 via Zoom video conferencing due to the pandemic. Committee meetings of the Council are held via Zoom video conferencing in the months between the quarterly meetings. The Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH) provides financial, logistic, and interpreter/CART support for Council meetings. It reimburses Council members for travel expenses to its quarterly meetings. As a result of the pandemic, DSDHH experienced an unprecedented increase in the usage of interpreters forcing them to reallocate their budget to accommodate the rise in interpreter expenses. In cooperation, the Council reduced the number of and then suspended all Committee meetings from October 2022 through June 2023.

The Council's duties include:

- Making recommendations to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for cost-effective provision, coordination, and improvement of services;
- To create public awareness of the specific needs and abilities of people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or DeafBlind and to consider the need for new State programs concerning the deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind;

- To advise the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services during planning and implementation of services being provided to North Carolina citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, or DeafBlind with respect to the quality, extent, and scope of those services;
- To advise the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction regarding planning, implementation, and cost-effective coordination of State programs providing educational services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or DeafBlind; and
- To respond to the request of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for advice or recommendations pertaining to any matter affecting deaf, hard of hearing, or DeafBlind citizens of North Carolina. (1989, C. 533, s. 2:1997-443, s. 11A.118(a); 2003-343, s. 1.)

The Council heard various concerns from Deaf/deaf adults, concerned parents, professionals, and educators of children/youth who are Deaf/deaf, DeafBlind, or hard of hearing. The Council addresses these concerns via a committee structure. Current committees are **Audiology/Health, Disability/Diversity**, and **Education**. Matters are referred to a committee. Each committee analyzes them to determine if they fall within the scope of the Council's charge and if further study or action is needed. Once the concern is valid and the issue is examined in depth, committee members can request additional information or data to aid in formulating a recommendation for action before the full Council. For example, the Audiology/Health committee worked with appropriate state medical associations to incorporate hearing screening as part of the standard routine screening for diabetes; the Disability/Diversity committee requested a change in the Patient's Bill of Rights to include communication accessibility for persons with hearing loss; and the Education committee is looking into the concept of regional educational programs for students who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing in light of the shortage of Teachers of the Deaf crisis in North Carolina.

When a committee determines an issue that needs to go before the full Council for action, a background of the problem and the committee's recommendations are presented to the full Council during a quarterly meeting for discussion and approval. Letters or reports are generated and shared with the Department of Health and Human Services, the State Board of Education, the Department of Public Instruction, the Governor, and the North Carolina State Legislature members.

The following committees addressed issues identified by Council members as being critical to the well being and quality of life for citizens of North Carolina who are Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened. The outcomes are in parenthesis and italics:

The **Audiology/Health** committee

- Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs) and Over Counter Hearing Aids (OTC) (*Heard presentations about PSAPs and OTC Hearing Aids. Waiting for the FDA to issue rules before taking further action*)
- Hearing Loss and Balance Testing Included in NC Diabetes Advisory Council Standards of Care (*Worked with Medical Organizations to ensure inclusion and implementation of standards*)
- Educating Primary Care/Internal Medicine Providers to Follow New Standards for Diabetes Care (*Worked with Medical Organizations to ensure inclusion and implementation of standards*)
- Supporting Children Being Served with IEP/504 Plans in Virtual School Settings (*Determined to be a non-issue since students are back in the school settings statewide*)
- Social Isolation of Aged Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (*Heard presentations on this topic - ongoing topic*)
- OTC Guidelines (*Waiting for FDA to issue rules before taking further action*)
- IEP Process - Defining Who Plays What Role in Decision Making (*Discussed in committee - determined not to be a statewide concern*)
- Audiologists Not Being Reimbursed by NC Medicaid for Mapping (Cochlear Implant Programming Codes) (*Not yet started on this topic*)

The **Disability/Diversity** committee

- Disability Rights (*Drafting a proposal for Closed Caption law in public places in North Carolina*)
- Systemic Racism and Social Injustice within the NC Deaf Community (*Working to invite diverse people from the Deaf community to participate in committee meetings to gain their input on this topic*)

- Inclusion, and Sensitivity Training (*Heard presentations from DHHS on Equity and Inclusion policies and training materials*)
- Qualified Black Deaf Teachers Not Being Hired for Specific Positions (*Ongoing topic*)
- Social Isolation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Seniors (*Heard presentations on this topic - ongoing topic*)

The **Education** committee

- Supporting Children Being Served with IEP/504 Plans in the Virtual School Setting (*Determined to be a non-issue since students are back in the school settings statewide*)
- Issues in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (*Subcommittee established to focus on this topic*)
- Qualified Black Teachers Not Being Hired for Specific Positions (*Discussed internally - ongoing topic*)
- Strengthen Education in Schools for Deaf and Mainstreamed Programs, Including DeafBlind (*Heard presentations on this topic - a Report on Education of the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Plus in North Carolina was developed, approved by the full Council, and sent to the Governor, Legislators, Stakeholders, DPI, and interested parties*)
- EIPA Credentials Raised to 4.0 with Steps for Mentoring Educational Interpreters to Reach That Level (*Determined to be a non-issue since the Board of Education of DPI approved Task Force recommendations to increase the minimum requirements to 3.5 and implementing a mentoring program to help current educational interpreters improve their skills in order to achieve the higher minimum score*)
- Clinical Audiologists' Recommendations to IEP Teams that Override IEP Team Recommendations: Clarity of Role of Audiologists in IEP Team Meetings (*Discussed in committee - determined not to be a statewide concern*)
- Educational Programs for 3-5 Year Old Children Who are Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing (*Heard presentations on this topic - a Report on Education of the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Plus in North Carolina was developed, approved by the full Council, and sent to the Governor, Legislators, Stakeholders, DPI, and interested parties*)

This year, as mentioned above, the Council approved a *Report to the Governor and State Legislature of North Carolina on Issues in Education of Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Plus Students in North Carolina* and sent it to the Governor, State Legislature, DPI, and Stakeholders highlighting staffing and education issues of concern and presented recommendations for action. Some legislators were interested in the Report and requested further information before introducing legislation to address these issues. Many recommendations in the Report were contained in education bills introduced in the 2023 state legislative session.

## **FY 2021-2022**

The following pages highlights presentations made to the Council and end with actions taken during FY 2021-2022.

### **EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

**Ms. Tara Myers**, Deputy Secretary for Employment, Inclusion and Economic Stability, DHHS, covered DHHS's Equity and Inclusion (EI) Mission to grow a high performing, diverse workforce and cultivate an inclusive workplace where employees are fully engaged to deliver exceptional services and programs. They aim to interweave EI in all facets of their work, including contracting opportunities and engagement with internal/external customers.

**Mr. Kody Kinsley**, the new Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), introduced himself and addressed how DHHS and the Council could be more collaborative in serving the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened population equitably in terms of communications and services.

**Mr. Victor Armstrong**, Chief Health Equity Officer, highlighted his department's efforts to increase and improve health equity and reduce/eliminate health disparities among the marginalized population in the state. He also introduced **Ms. Debra Farrington**, chief of staff for the NC Medicaid within the Division for Health Benefits, and **Ms. Angela Bryant**, Assistant Secretary for Equity and Inclusion.

## SAFELY RETURNING TO SCHOOL

**Ms. Sherry Thomas**, Director of Exceptional Children, Office of Educational Equity at DPI covered some lessons learned over the past 18 months of the pandemic. She covered DPI's actions to support districts daily because guidance kept changing overnight. She covered the challenges districts faced in serving Pre-K through 12th-grade students, especially equitable access to education in a remote learning environment and the teacher of the deaf and educational interpreter vacancies statewide.

**Ms. Denise Nelson**, Lead for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Services, Durham Public School District, provided greater detail into the challenges public schools faced during the pandemic in serving students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing. The biggest challenge they faced was access barriers of equipment provided to students, features that varied by the devices, and a need for internet access at students' homes. All these challenges impacted the academic progress of all students. She also mentioned that the teacher of the deaf shortage is at a crisis level and the need for educational services for deaf and hard of hearing children aged 3-5.

**Mr. Mark Patrick**, Director of the North Carolina School for the Deaf in Morganton highlighted NCSD's lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. He spoke about necessity being the mother of reinvention. They were constantly reinventing the wheel due to having to provide virtual classrooms and the challenges they faced in providing educational support. Due to certain areas students are from, some needed internet access, leading to incredibly isolated conditions. Staff at NCSD communicated with the students daily to ensure their social and emotional needs were met. He ended with the message that flexibility is a requirement to be successful and embracing change as an opportunity to improve oneself and try new things rather than viewing it as adversity.

**Dr. Michele Handley**, Director of the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf in Wilson, discussed the challenges presented by the 23 vacant positions at the school. She covered their efforts in filling these positions only to see candidates back out of job offers, citing difficulties in finding affordable housing. She touched on issues with teacher retention, burnout, and challenges in recruiting teachers compounded by the fact that they could not compete with other state teacher pay scales, which paid better than North Carolina. Another recruiting obstacle was certification, which requires extra

course work and a terminal degree. ENCSD developed a model of serving each student one on one by splitting class time to help students individually get meaning from the training. Like NCSD, they experienced a vital obstacle of a lack of internet access and connectivity at their students' homes. They established a summer program called Operation Accelerate, which was a two week program due to a shortage of staff, and had 80% participation. This summer program was a success, and they plan to offer it again next summer.

## **EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

**Dr. Claudia Pagliaro** and **Ms. Lynne Allen** of the K-12 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Licensure Program at the University of North Carolina - Greensboro provided the Council with an overview of the State of Education of the Deaf in North Carolina and the United States:

- More Deaf and Hard of Hearing children are in integrated settings
- There is a shortage of quality licensed teachers across the country - there are at least 13 K-12 teacher of the Deaf vacancies in North Carolina
- Conflicts between licensure requirements, university requirements, and best practices continue to plague programs educating students to become teachers of the Deaf
- The pay for current NC teachers of the Deaf is 18% less than US average
- There are 51 total Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Preparation Programs across the US. NC has only 1 program (UNC-G). There are six such programs in surrounding states (GA-2, SC-1, TN-2, VA-1)
- There is a need for more teachers of the Deaf who are Deaf themselves and teachers/Deaf teachers of color

## **SOCIAL ISOLATION OF THE DEAF DUE TO THE PANDEMIC**

**Ms. Rebecca Freeman, MPH**, Consumer Affairs and Legislative Liaison, Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAA), covered the establishment of a social isolation workgroup within the Division of Aging Adult Services to partner with other DHHS Divisions and stakeholders to create a larger workgroup to focus on social isolation and suicides and come up with strategies to recognize social isolation issues, increase efforts to identify



those who might be isolated or lonely and provide safe opportunities for these people to engage with others and with nature. They came up with two initiatives:

- Surveying the DAA network and part of DHHS’s network and training staff in two interventions that help address social isolation, loneliness, and elevated suicide risks, and
- They contracted with the NC Center for Health and Wellness at UNC-Asheville to develop a statewide social engagement web resource.

**Ms. Katie Franklin**, Hard of Hearing Specialist, Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH), spoke about social isolation among hard of hearing, deaf, and DeafBlind adults. She touched on four key factors in helping to reduce loneliness depending on the cause:

- Increasing access to social interactions
- Increasing social support
- Changing unhelpful thoughts about social situations
- Improving social skills

She presented research showing that hearing loss in older adults is linked to increased social isolation, depression, lower self-efficacy, loneliness and decreased social functioning. She added that the lack of a requirement for clinically recommended best practices for hearing screenings in long-term care facilities is a concern since most residents in long-term care are age 65 and older with prevalence of hearing loss are estimated to be 70-90%. She added that isolation among the Deaf and DeafBlind is caused by communication barriers and lack of support service provider (SSP) services.

**Ms. Dora Tin**, Mental Health Clinician for RHA, and **Ms. Alexandra Ling**, School Psychologist for NCSD-Morganton, presented on social isolation in children from age 0-5 and in children in grade school (1st to 8th grade). Language deprivation leads to mental health difficulties, difficulties with abstract thinking, limited health literacy, lower quality of life, cognitive and language problems, and a higher level of trauma.

## SERVING MILITARY VETERANS WITH HEARING LOSS

**Mr. Sean Baker**, Veterans Liaison, DSDHH, spoke about his unique role of helping veterans with hearing loss and their families and caregivers learn about and connect to communication access resources in their community. He enlightened Council members about his partnership with several organizations to gain exposure to his services, and listed his accomplishments.

## NC MEDICAID ACCESS PILOT PROGRAM

**Mr. David Litman** of DSDHH provided an overview of the Medicaid Access pilot program designed to help Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind North Carolinians access equitable communication for healthcare appointments. The program ensures effective communication between patients and providers, attempts to improve health outcomes of patients and their companions with hearing loss, reimburses health care providers for covered services, and provides free training and guidance to registered health care providers. He provided an update on its activities over the past year.

## NC EARLY HEARING DETECTION AND INTERVENTION

**Dr. Marcia Fort**, Genetics and Newborn Screening Unit Manager and NC Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Coordinator, Division of Public Health, discussed the reorganization within DHHS designed to strengthen existing collaborations and establish new ones which can only improve access for All Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing children and their families. She also shared the DHHS strategic plan for 2021-2023.

## RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC UPDATE

**Ms. Jan Withers**, Director of DSDHH, and **Mr. Tony Davis**, Accessibility Resources Coordinator of DSDHH, updated the Council on the Division's implementation of new activities to improve healthcare equity in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Mr. Davis highlighted the Division's collaborative efforts with other health organizations to improve communication access at vaccination sites and make pandemic health information accessible at Town Hall meetings in several counties across the state.

**Ms. Lauren Crowley**, Clinical Lead Therapist within RHA's Behavioral Health Services Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program, provided an overview of RHA's response to mental health care services impacted by the pandemic. She highlighted the drastic increase in depression and anxiety cases among the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population that was referred to them. RHA expanded its use of video telehealth services to handle this increase in caseload safely during the pandemic.

## **NC INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE TASK FORCE ON COMMUNICATION ACCESS IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS UPDATE**

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted DSDHH's timeline for implementing the 14 recommendations from the 2020 NC Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) Task Force Report on Communication Access in Health Care Settings. **Ms. Jan Withers**, Director of DSDHH, highlighted the Division's efforts in ensuring communication access within the health care setting through the development and provision of information/fact sheets to medical professionals designed to provide greater communication accessibility as well as distribution of transparent masks to front line personnel working with Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing patients. She highlighted DHHS' collection of COVID-19 data which led to the establishment of the Office of Health Equity. The focus on healthcare equity ultimately led to a partnership between DSDHH, the Office of Health Equity, and NCIOM. This partnership will go a long way towards assisting DSDHH in overseeing the 14 Task Force recommendation implementation.

## **DEAF MENTOR PROGRAM**

The new Deaf Mentor Program implemented by DSDHH and the Division of Child and Family Well Being (DCFWB) enables DSDHH and DCFWB to partner with adults who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and train them to be mentors for families with young children with hearing loss. DHHS leadership authorized DSDHH to provide a leading role in coordinating this program. The two Divisions above will work together to conduct outreach activities to raise awareness of the availability of the deaf mentor program; foster an effective referral process; and monitor outcomes of this program through the lens of the child's language acquisition as well as the development of their psychosocial

skills. **Ms. Jan Withers**, DSDHH Director, and **Dr. Marcia Fort**, Manager of Genetics and Newborn Screening within the DCFWB, introduced **Ms. Jenna Rankin** and **Ms. Jessica Peterson**, mothers of deaf children who shared their experiences with their deaf children that led to the implementation of the program.

## COMMUNICATION ACCESS FOR DEAF PARENTS WITH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

**Mr. M. Antwan Campbell**, Education Consultant for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Interpreters, DPI, updated the Council members regarding previous complaints received from parents who are Deaf and have hearing children in the local school systems. Deaf parents complained about not having communication access during their children's school activities. He covered steps DPI took to address these complaints by partnering with DSDHH to host three (3) forums across the state to hear parent concerns. From the forums, they were able to identify three (3) key issues. With this information, DPI developed resource information shared with schools and deaf parents; created training about the differences between interpreters and the laws that go with each ADA/IDEA/504; and provided a webinar for all superintendents and EC directors for all the districts to address communication access concerns. Since implementing the above steps, Mr. Campbell has had only two (2) complaints during the pandemic. Now that the students are back in school, he will watch to see if the complaints increase.

## NC INTERPRETER AND TRANSLITERATOR LICENSING BOARD (NCITLB)- RULES AND STATUTE UPDATE

**Ms. Pam White**, Education Settings Representative on the NCITLB Board, covered the history of the NCITLB action due to the National Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (RID) placing a moratorium on its testing process. The NCITLB statute states explicitly that the RID interpreter/transliterators test is the only pathway to full licensure in North Carolina.

She explained the NCITLB Board proposed a legislative amendment to empower the Board to seek and approve other certification processes currently used by other states.

# FY 2022-2023

## LOBBYING VS. EDUCATING: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

**Mr. David Smyth**, Education Counsel, North Carolina State Ethics Commission, educated Council members on the topic of the difference between lobbying vs. educating as part of the due diligence of the Council leadership in making sure members of the Council do not violate state laws while engaging in conversations with legislators on topics of concern to the group.

## POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION COLLABORATION

Transition services for students who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing attending school at all levels and entering post-secondary education or the workforce is a critical part of their life journey. **Mr. Kevin Earp**, Rehabilitation Program Specialist on Deafness and Communication Disorders within Vocational Rehabilitation; **Ms. Virginia Madorin**, Consultant for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Co-Director of the NC DeafBlind Project within the Department of Public Instruction; and **Ms. Johanna Lynch**, Parent Educator at Beginnings, talked about the state initiative bringing together state leaders from agencies and vocational rehabilitation to support an exchange of ideas and collaboration to improve post-secondary outcomes for students who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

## THE COCHLEAR IMPLANT PROCESS

When a newborn baby is identified as having a hearing loss after undergoing an initial hearing screening test at the hospital, their parents feel overwhelmed by the diagnosis. What are the parents to do? What medical options are available to them? How do they connect to resources to help them understand the diagnosis and its impact on the child and family? What communication options in NC are available to them? If the parents consider a Cochlear Implant (CI) for their infant, what steps must they take? The Council looked at the whole process from the initial Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) Exam to the experiences and outcomes of young adults who were implanted at a very early age, to

understand the CI evaluation process. **Kevin Brown, M.d., Ph.D.**, Otologist at the UNC School of Medicine, **Erika Gagnon, Au.D.**, Pediatric Audiologist at the UNC School of Medicine, **Ms. Beth Whitfield**, Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, NC Department of Public Instruction, **Ms. Diane E. Soak**, Executive Director of Beginnings, **Ms. Johanna Lynch**, Parent Educator at Beginnings, and **Mr. Mark Patrick**, Director of the NC School for the Deaf - Morganton, all educated the Council about their areas of expertise. **Mr. and Mrs. John and Melinda Lanier**, parents of Deaf children; **Ms. Holly Shoun**, parent of a young Deaf adult; **Mr. Craig Lewis**, parent of a young Deaf adult; and **Ms. Katie Linder** and **Ms. Mary Margaret Lewis**, young adults with CIs, shared their respective experiences with the Council and answered questions.

## THE NORTH CAROLINA OLMSTEAD PLAN

**Ms. Holly Riddle, Esq.**, Assistant Director for Olmstead Plan Implementation under the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, gave an in-depth presentation about the Olmstead Plan's history, its mandate, its purpose, how it came to be in North Carolina. She also covered the Olmstead Plan Stakeholder Advisory I and II committees and outlined the 11 current priorities her office is working on.

## DIGITAL EQUITY AND LITERACY

**Ms. Jan Withers**, Director of DSDHH, discussed the fact that millions of Americans with hearing loss, including those with deaf-blindness, experience digital divide, digital discrimination, digital exclusion, or digital inequity, especially those who are unable to afford the equipment that is necessary or the internet access. We are transitioning from a world without digital means, access, information, and communication technology to a world where we depend on it. She covered the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and highlighted the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) efforts to educate all Americans about the ACP, including those with hearing loss.

Ms. Withers informed the Council that DSDHH recently connected with the North Carolina Office of Digital Equity and Literacy under the Department of Information and Technology, and is also partnering with the NC Department of Health and Human Services to apply for FCC grant funding to conduct outreach across North Carolina about the ACP.

An upcoming conference on digital inclusion for all hosted by TDI, a national organization that advocates for full access to information and communication technology that Ms. Withers is involved with, was shared with Council members. She touched on a new bill introduced by U.S. Senator Ed Markey called the Communication Video Technology Accessibility Act, which, if passed, updates the 21st Century Communication and Video Accessibility Act. Ms. Withers hopes that this work on the national level will also positively impact all of us in North Carolina.

## NCITLB UPDATE

**Mr. Mark Lineberger**, Vice Chair of the North Carolina Interpreter and Transliterators Licensing Board (NCITLB), provided an update on the bill's progress introduced in the last session. He reiterated the information shared by Ms. Pam White at the May 2022 Council meeting, shared revisions made to the original bill, and asked the Council to continue to support NCITLB's legislative efforts.

## EDUCATIONAL DATA

**Ms. Sherry Thomas**, Senior Director of the Exceptional Children Division at the Department of Public Instruction, and **Ms. Nancy Woytowich**, Consultant for Deaf and Hard of Hearing for Regions 1-4, educated the Council about the purpose of data collection related to Session Law 2013-119 (House Bill 317) and how it helps improve the education of Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind students in North Carolina.

## THE COCHLEAR IMPLANT PROCESS: EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

**Ms. Christina Armfield**, Lead for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing & Visually Impaired for the Alamance-Burlington School System and **Ms. Donna Pleasants**, Educational Audiologist, Alamance-Burlington School System, presented on the educational support provided to students within the Alamance-Burlington School System who have a cochlear implant.

This presentation was initially a part of the Cochlear Implant Process agenda at the November 2022 Council meeting. However, due to the Exceptional Children Conference going on at the same time, it was rescheduled.

## COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY IN NC COURTS

**Mr. Anthony Davis**, Accessibility Resources Program Manager, DSDHH, and **Ms. Meredith Ellington**, Disability Access Coordinator, Administrative Office of the Courts, updated the Council about their partnership/collaboration that started in September of 2020. They talked about their efforts in increasing communication accessibility in the North Carolina court system by hosting Meet and Greet sessions between the DSDHH staff and County Disability Access coordinators statewide; the training to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities about accessibility in the Courts; recruiting and training ASL interpreters for the Courts; and adding ASL and captioning to the introduction to the NC Courts video.

## TELEHEALTH ACCESSIBILITY GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES

**Mr. Anthony Davis**, Accessibility Resources Program Manager, DSDHH, apprised Council members about DSDHH's Telehealth initiative. He walked Council members through DSDHH's Telehealth Accessibility and Guidance website and familiarized them with its content. He explained how it all started, the workgroups he recruited, the challenges they faced, outlined the phases of development, and asked Council members to immerse themselves into the Telehealth Guidance Webpage to let him know what works, what does not, what needs to be improved, what resources should be added, and most importantly, tell everyone about it. This website has proven to be a valuable resource nationally for telehealth accessibility guidance.

## UPDATE ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION ACCESS IN NC

**Ms. Donna Platt**, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, DSDHH, covered the status of emergency communications access in North Carolina for persons who are Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened. She discussed the Next Generation 911 Vision of emergency communication access anytime, anywhere, on any device. Ms. Platt honed in on how people with hearing loss can access 911 services directly (e.g., Voice, TTY, SMS, Real-Time Text [RTT], etc.). She explained the different types of text technologies and how to use them. Ms. Platt advised the Council that Next Generation 911 systems are in place in all PSAPs in North Carolina except for one, and all of them accept text-to-911 communications.



Finally, she covered 911 resources such as the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), the Communication, Video, Technology Accessibility Act (CVTA) pending in Congress, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) resources.

## **CURRENT OR PENDING NC LEGISLATION IMPACTING DEAF, DEAFBLIND, AND HARD OF HEARING**

**Mr. David Rosenthal**, Chair of the NCCDHH, provided an overview of current legislation in the 2023 North Carolina Legislative session which could impact persons who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. The Council reviewed Session Law 2013-119 in light of recent presentations to this body to suggest recommendations to update it to improve educational outcomes for students who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

Session Law 2023-10 (House Bill 11) was also reviewed.

## **ACTIONS THE COUNCIL UNDERTOOK IN FY 2022**

The Council is vital in bringing up issues that impact North Carolinians with hearing loss. Some of the topics discussed and still under consideration or acted on are:

- The Disability/Diversity committee is looking at requirements to have all televisions in public places (e.g., bars, hospitals, airports, etc.) statewide in North Carolina have captions on at all times
- The Audiology/Health committee reviewed CDC guidelines for hearing and vision loss and the risk of falls in diabetes care. Due to the efforts of Council member, **Dr. Kathryn Dowd**, the NC diabetes guidelines now include hearing testing and screening for balance at the time of diagnosis and then annually after that
- The Council wrote, reviewed and approved a Report to the Governor and State Legislature of North Carolina on Issues in Education of Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Plus Students in North Carolina which was forwarded to the Governor, members of the state legislature, and interested organizations

- The Disability/Diversity committee proposed, and the Council approved the recommendation that the Medical Care Commission include the right to interpreters in the Patients' Bill of Rights. The Council is working with DSDHH and DHHS to make this happen
- The Disability/Diversity and Education committees are looking at ways to help increase the number of Deaf and Black Deaf teachers of the Deaf in the North Carolina school system
- The Disability/Diversity committee is exploring ways to address systemic racism and social injustice within the North Carolina Deaf Community. The Council is working on increasing the number of BIPOC Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to attend/participate in Council committee meetings
- The Audiology/Health committee is exploring recommendations to address the social isolation of aged Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals due to the pandemic

## **ACTIONS THE COUNCIL UNDERTOOK IN FY 2023**

- The Council voted at the February 2023 meeting to continue to support NCITLB's proposed revised amendments to the bill they introduced in the 2023 legislative session
- The Council voted at the May 2023 meeting to have the Chair send a letter to the Chairman of the State Board of Education, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House offering our recommendations on qualities candidates should possess for consideration for the Board of Trustee positions of the East North Carolina School for the Deaf in Wilson and the North Carolina School for the Deaf in Morganton
- The Council, at the May 2023 meeting, voted to have the Chair list our recommendations for refining and improving Session Law 2013-119 in a letter to the Superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services

- The Council voted at the May 2023 meeting to approve the North Carolina Council for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing Annual Report for dissemination to the Governor, Legislators, and stakeholders

## 2021-2023 MEMBERS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND THE HARD OF HEARING

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representation</b>
<b>David S. Rosenthal, Council Chair</b>	North Carolina Association of the Deaf	<b>Randal Lee Hartline</b>	NC Deaf Blind Association
<b>Michael Tyler Evola, Council Vice-Chair</b>	Hard of Hearing Consumers	<b>Donald Tinsley, Sr.</b>	NC Black Deaf Advocates
<b>Mike Lupo</b>	Deaf Consumers	<b>Meredith DeNaples</b>	Parent of a Deaf Child
<b>Greta Knigga-Daugherty</b>	Deaf Consumers	<b>Daphne M. Peacock</b>	Parent of a Deaf Child
<b>Hope Turpin</b>	Deaf Consumers	<b>Pattie Griffin</b>	Parent of a Deaf Child
<b>Linda Amato</b>	Hard of Hearing Consumers	<b>Laurie Ann Rook</b>	NC Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
<b>Megan Pender</b>	Hard of Hearing Consumers	<b>Robert C. Nutt, M.D., MPH</b>	NC Pediatric Society
<b>Elizabeth Strachan</b>	Hearing Loss Association-NC	<b>Kathryn Dowd, Au.D.</b>	Licensed Audiologist
<b>Erika Gagnon, Au.D.</b>	Cochlear Implants	<b>Christina Armfield</b>	Local Education Agency
<b>Claudia Pagliaro, Ph.D.</b>	Educator, Deaf Education Program	<b>Betty Kelly</b>	Department of Health and Human Services
<b>Kevin Earp</b>	Department of Health and Human Services	<b>Rebecca Freeman</b>	Department of Health and Human Services
<b>Saarah Waleed</b>	Department of Health and Human Services	<b>Antwan Campbell</b>	Department of Public Instruction
<b>Carla Cunningham</b>	Speaker of the House	<b>Diane Wheatley</b>	Speaker of the House
<b>Vacant</b>	President Pro Tem of the Senate	<b>Vacant</b>	President Pro Tem of the Senate

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